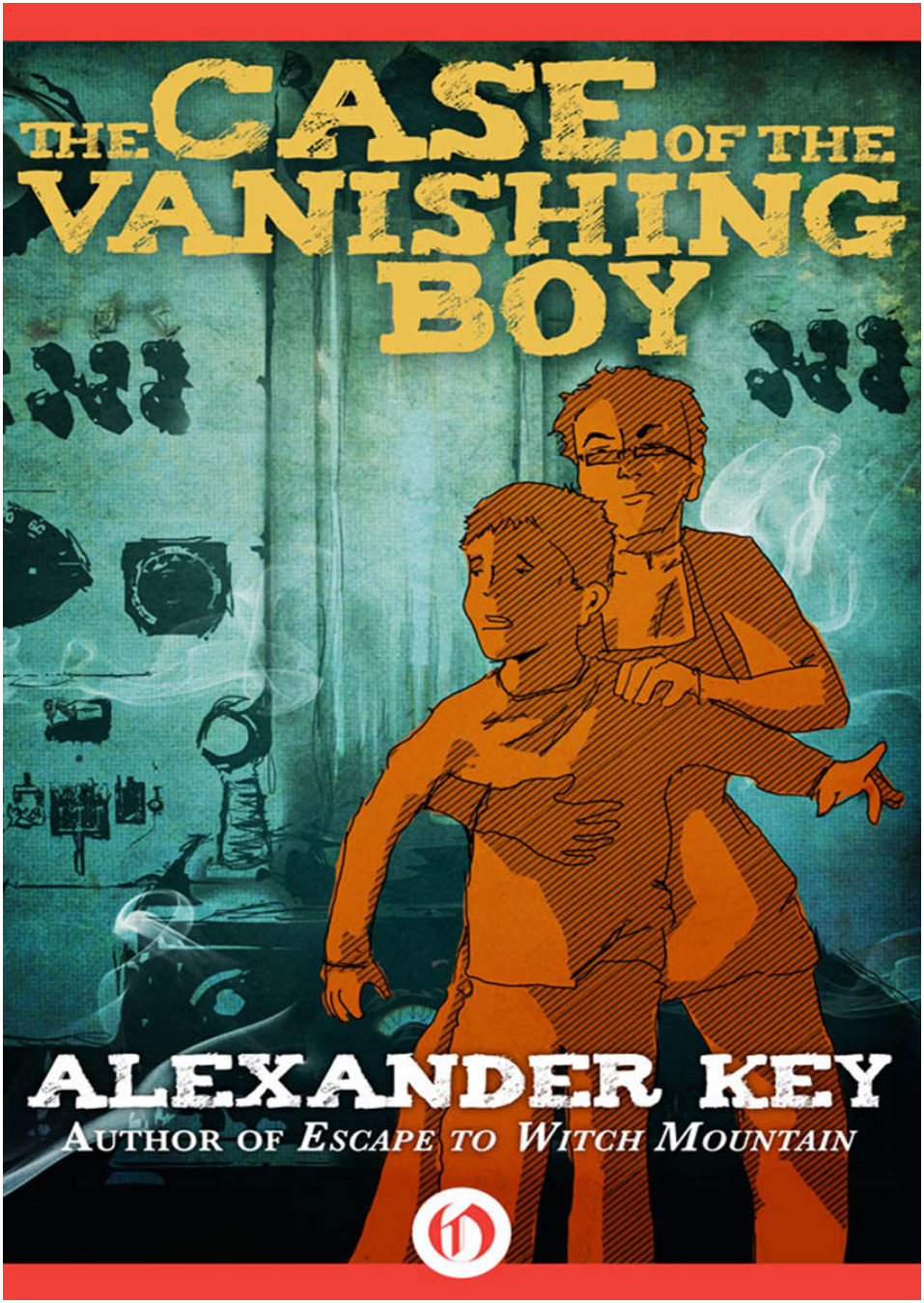
THE CASE OF THE VANISHING BOY
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The Case of the Vanishing Boy

Alexander Key

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This book is for those quiet ones among us whose abilities are seldom suspected, for they do not speak of themselves.

1

FLIGHT

Jan sat motionless in his seat, staring blankly in front of him while the train, loaded with returning commuters from the city, sped impatiently through the deepening twilight. At the moment he had no idea why he happened to be on board, nor was he even aware of the small girl who had taken a seat beside him.

"Is something wrong?" she said finally in a low, quiet voice. "You're not sick, are you?"

It was several seconds before her questions penetrated the curious void in which he was momentarily lost. Then he jerked around, startled, and blinked at her uncertainly. She was a frail little blonde person, neatly dressed in faded but fashionable jeans covered with embroidery. Curving around and hiding a good portion of her sensitive freckled face was the largest pair of dark glasses he had ever seen. One slender hand clung firmly to the top of a white cane.

"No, I'm not sick," he muttered, wondering about the cane.

"But something's wrong," she insisted. "You're in some sort of trouble."

"Don't be so nosey." The gruff words came out before he could stop them. The possibilities of the void seemed far better than the coldness of reality.

Rebuffed, she looked away and did not speak until the train had discharged some of its passengers at the next station and was hurrying forward again.

"I'm sorry," she said finally. "I don't want to be nosey, but you *are* in trouble. I can feel it. Have you friends in Westlake?"

"I—why do you ask?"

"You bought a ticket for Westlake when you got on at Glendale. I know, 'cause you were right behind me when I bought mine, and I heard what you said to the ticket agent. I had a funny feeling at the time that you didn't know where you wanted to go, and that the only reason you said Westlake was because you'd heard me say it."

"Oh."

"Am I right?"

"I—I—"

" 'Course I'm right. That's why I decided I'd better sit down by you, 'cause you might need help." She paused a moment, then asked, "What's your name?"

He swallowed and searched wildly through his memory. "Bill," he said at last.

She shook her head. "Bill doesn't seem to fit. You've forgotten your name, but maybe I can sort of remember it for you." Her cool, slender hand closed over his wrist. "Now, don't think of anything. Just let your mind go blank. And—and

please, I know I'm being nosey, but it's not because I'm really that way. I—I simply want to help."

"It's all right," he admitted. "I'm sorry I said what I did. But I don't think you can do much for me."

Resentment of her passed. He looked at her with rising interest and curiosity, and was suddenly jolted by the discovery that her glasses were too dark to see through. If he couldn't see through them, then neither could she. She carried a white cane, and her eyes had always been closed whenever he'd caught a narrow glimpse of them from the side.

"Yes," she said, as if easily picking up his thoughts. "I'm blind, sort of. But stop thinking of me. Don't think of *anything*."

He tried to make his mind a blank, but it was very difficult under the circumstances. He was sure he had never known such a remarkable person.

"You've got a name that begins with a sound like mine," she said presently. "Mine's Ginny. Ginny Rhodes. Yours starts with a *G*. No, it must be a *J*. It's a short name, but it isn't Jim or Joe. It must be … Jan. Of course, it *is* Jan. But I can't get the last. It's all mixed up and fuzzy, as if there were several names and they didn't really belong to you. Why don't you look through your pockets and see if you can find a letter or something that would give us a clue."

He searched through the pockets of his jeans and found only a pearl-handled knife, a bandana handkerchief, some small change and twelve dollars in bills. It wasn't much to go on.

"Is this all you ever carry in your pockets?" Ginny asked, surprised. "Just a knife, a handkerchief and some money?"

"Why, I—I dunno. It does seem like I ought to have at least a billfold."

"My brother Otis is only five, but the stuff that comes out of his pockets would fill a wheelbarrow." She fingered the handkerchief and held it before her eyes a moment. "A blue bandana, and it's clean. I never knew Otis to have a clean one more than five minutes."

"How can you tell the color?"

"Oh, I can tell, even in the dark."

"The dark!"

"I can get along in the dark much better than in the light. Daylight hurts. That's why I wear these special glasses."

"But—but you seem to see, even with your eyes closed. I—I don't understand."

"Neither does anyone else, though Pops is making a study of it. But let's talk about you, not me. Why were you in Glendale?"

"I—I don't know."

"You must have been in a hurry to leave it 'cause you'd been running when you came into the station behind me. You were breathing hard, and I could feel how scared you were."

She paused, then asked, "Don't you remember any of that?"

"All I can remember is buying the ticket to Westlake. That and being afraid I wouldn't catch the first train that came by."

"Are you still scared?"

He swallowed. "I must be, because I feel all wound up tight, like something was going to happen."

"But surely if there was any danger, you must have left it behind. Just thank

goodness my ticket book ran out when it did, so that I had to buy a ticket home. If that hadn't happened I wouldn't have gone into the station, and we wouldn't have met."

She frowned, and said, "It's almost dark. What would you have done if you had managed to get to a strange place, and dark had come, and there wasn't a soul you knew and you didn't know where to go?"

He shrugged. "I'd have managed somehow—and I will in Westlake."

"Honest? The thought doesn't scare you?"

"Not half as much as—as—"

"As what?"

"I—I don't know. What were you doing in Glendale?"

"I go there every Wednesday and Friday afternoon to study piano with the best music teacher in the world. Oh, I just love the piano! But let's get back to you. A stranger can't go wandering around a place like Westlake without being noticed and watched. But there's no need for you to wander around. Pops always meets me at the station with his car, so you're going home with us."

"But—but you can't do that! He doesn't know me, and you don't either. You don't even know what I look like."

"I know exactly what you look like. You're not very big, 'cause you're only four inches taller than I am, and almost as skinny except that you're awfully strong. And you've got black hair and high cheekbones like an Indian, only you're too pale for an Indian, so you must be Irish or French or something."

He gaped at her. "I don't know how you do it with your eyes closed, but you sure hit it on the button."

"As for your character, I trust you completely—and I'm never wrong about that, as Pops can tell you. And that's not all," she hurried on, before he could open his mouth again. "You've got a secret ability that's crazier than mine. It's terrific! I mean, it's *really* terrific! Why, Pops would give anything to study you."

A sudden chill went through him. "No!" he gasped.

"Oh, dear," she breathed. "Did I say something I shouldn't? I know you have an ability, a very strange one. I can feel it in you. But I don't know what it is yet, and I won't try to find out if you don't want me to."

"I don't want to be studied," he said grimly.

She was silent a moment, looking at him. "Jan?"

"Yeah?"

"Have people tried to study you before?"

"I—I dunno. I just don't want to be studied, that's all."

"Oh, very well. I won't say a word about it to Pops without your permission. But you *are* coming home with us."

"I don't think I'd better."

"Jan, you've *got* to! If you're alone the police at Westlake will know right away you don't belong there. They're sure to ask questions. What's going to happen when you can't answer them?" Without waiting for a reply she went on eagerly, "Pops dotes on puzzling people like you and me, and he'll love to help you. I won't give you away to him, though, if you'll promise not to give me away to anyone else. Understand?"

"No. What do you mean?"

"The only people who know about my eyes are you, Aunt Hecuba, and Pops

and Otis. Everyone else, even my music teacher and our tenant farmer and his family, all think of me as the poor little blind Rhodes girl, and say I ought to have a Seeing Eye dog, which I don't need. Anyway, they and the police and the conductors on the train all sort of watch out for me—and I do need help at times, for I haven't any depth perception at all. Not a smidgen."

He wasn't quite sure what she meant by depth perception, and before he could ask she was explaining, "We have to keep it quiet about my eyes, because if it ever got out I'd really be in the news. And that wouldn't be good at all, because Pops is Heron Rhodes, and we'd lose all our privacy and be plagued to death by reporters, and all kinds of kooks and connivers out for money. Pops—he's my grandfather—says it's much better to be poor and unknown than a rich celebrity who is always in danger."

The train, as she was speaking, had begun to slow. Now he saw that the remaining passengers in the car were rising and moving to the front. The gloom beyond the window was suddenly replaced by a brightly lighted platform.

"Here we are," said Ginny, getting to her feet.

All at once he felt trapped. Uneasiness crept through him. Peering out, he could see cars parked around the station and two policemen moving determinedly across the platform. Just beyond them was a van where men in white jackets stood waiting expectantly. A chill gripped him.

"Come on," said Ginny, tugging at his sleeve.

"No—no!"

"But you can't stay here! This is the end of the line. The train will be going back to the city."

He stumbled into the aisle. But instead of following her he turned abruptly and fled blindly to the rear of the car. His only thought was to escape into the night.

2

FOUND

It was an electric train With two cars, and he was in the second car—facts he was not aware of until he burst into the compartment at the rear and saw the empty track with its third rail beyond the window. The only way out was through the sliding doors on either side. Both were closed.

He tugged frantically at the one on the right, which was away from the station platform. It would not budge. Whirling, he threw his weight on the other door. It slid back easily and he leaped out upon the end of the platform and sped down the steps that led to the track.

Surprised voices and a sudden shout behind him gave wings to his heels. He raced between the rails, searching for an opening in the steel fences that rose high on either side. Dimly ahead he made out a low place on the right where the wire did not meet a dip in the ground. He reached it just as a moving figure took form in the gloom beyond it.

A light flashed in his face. A voice heavy with authority challenged, “Hey, you! What are you doing here?”

Jan dropped down in a panic, scrambled under the wire, and clawed onward in the utter blackness of weeds and brush until he was halted by a tree. He got up, trembling, and went stumbling blindly through a tangle of brush and woods. “I won’t be caught!” he gasped to himself. “I’ll never let them catch me!”

Another tree on a downward slope stopped him with a jolt and he fell to his knees, his head ringing. When his head cleared and he had got his breath, he managed to stand again, but instead of going on he stood still for a while, listening. No one seemed to be following him. Deciding he was safe for the moment, he slumped weakly to the base of the tree to take stock of himself.

What’s the matter with me? he wondered. *What am I running from? I’m afraid of something—but what?*

Had he done anything against the law? Were the police after him? Was he a wanted criminal trying to escape? It didn’t seem likely, for there was nothing in his pockets that he couldn’t claim as his own, unless it was the twelve dollars he’d found in them. Where had the money come from, anyhow?

Remembering Ginny, he began to wonder if he hadn’t been foolish in running away merely because he’d seen two policemen crossing the platform. Or had it been the men by the van?

None of it made sense. All he knew for certain was that his name was Jan, and that he was hungry. He must not have had anything to eat for some time, for his

stomach was growling and he felt weak and a little dizzy.

The sudden flash and crack of lightning jerked him to his feet in alarm and drove him down the slope in a search for shelter. He could hear traffic ahead. Presently he found himself hurrying along a gravel path, with distant street lights and sudden bursts of lightning showing the way. The path took him to an alley behind a building. He reached the street beyond just as the rain began.

Jan lowered his head and dashed for the first sheltered entrance he could make out. In the slashing downpour he did not realize it was a small church until the door slowly opened and light spilled upon him. He shook the water from his jeans and faced the smiling scrutiny of a portly priest.

"Well, bless us both! I didn't know anyone was out here. Unless you were born a duck, come on in where it's dry!"

Jan entered hesitantly.

"You're scratched up a bit," the priest went on. "I assume you had a fall, though not a bad one. Are you all right?"

"I—I'm okay, sir."

"I don't believe we've met before. I'm Father Dancy."

"I'm Jan," he replied, taking the priest's outstretched hand. "Jan—Jan Riggs." The last name slid almost naturally from his tongue, coming so easily that he wondered if it really could be his own. For some reason he didn't like it at all and wished he'd thought of something else.

"Riggs," said Father Dancy. "Are you a newcomer in town?"

"Just passing through, sir. I—I got out to take a look around, and the rain caught me. Er, do you know where Heron Rhodes lives?"

"Rhodes? Rhodes? Oh, you must mean that Dr. Rhodes. He's a psychologist, I believe. He has a farm about five miles out of town."

"How can I find it from here?"

"Well, this street in front of the church runs straight into the highway going west. The Rhodes property borders the highway. It has a stone wall running the entire length of the place." The priest paused, eyeing him intently. "Do you know any of the family?"

"Just Ginny."

"Ginny? Oh, the little blind girl. She's really and truly quite—" Father Dancy stopped abruptly, his attention caught by something in the rain beyond the open door. "Now what can Sergeant Bricker be wanting? I'm sure he isn't coming to confess anything."

Jan glanced quickly through the door, and chilled as he made out a figure in a raincoat coming around the side of a police car at the curb. He managed to control an impulse to dash madly through the church in the hope of finding some way of escape at the rear. Instead he forced himself to say quietly, "Father, I'd like to use the washroom, if you have one here."

"Oh, yes. Of course. Down at the end of the aisle here you'll see a door on the right. The washroom is the second door on the other side."

Jan sped down the aisle, and made it to a small door just as Father Dancy stepped forward to meet Sergeant Bricker. He caught a glimpse of the two as he eased the door shut behind him, then he leaped down the dimly lighted hall and jerked open the first door he saw, to a tiny office lined with bookshelves. Behind the desk was a window, and to the left of it a narrow door obviously used as a

private exit.

In seconds he was in an alley outside, staring in dismay at the building in front of him and the high wall to the left that prevented him from reaching the area behind the church. The only avenue of escape was to the street. It meant going directly past Sergeant Bricker's car, which he could see through the lessening rain.

He swallowed and ran cautiously to the mouth of the alley, then flattened against the side of the church when he heard voices around the corner. The entrance, where he had stood hardly a minute ago, was only a few feet away.

"Are you sure?" Father Dancy was saying.

"No question of it! It has to be the Riggs boy."

"*Riggs*, did you say? May the good Lord help him! He did tell me his name was Riggs, but it meant nothing for I hadn't heard of him. Honestly, I can hardly believe—"

"You can't go by looks these days. I've seen some angel faces whose deeds would make your skin crawl. Now, stay well away from me, Father, when I go after him. I understand he has a knife, and I don't want you too close if he turns violent…."

Shock held Jan motionless. Something told him he ought to run, that his very life might depend upon it, but for long seconds he was incapable of movement. Then a rippling flash of lightning restored him to his senses and spurred him to flight.

It had been his intention to locate Ginny in the hope that her family could help him. But how could he do that now if he was a wanted criminal?

He put Ginny out of his mind and concentrated on escape. The rain helped, for there was very little traffic on the streets at the moment and the sidewalks were almost empty. The few people passing on foot paid no attention to him, for who looks at a running boy in the rain? But cars were another matter.

Several times in the next half hour he recognized the approach of a police car by the way it crept along and made use of a spotlight. He evaded each by hiding behind trees or shrubbery, or by slipping into an alley and hurrying to the next street.

Presently the houses thinned and the street lights were left behind. Then he was on a winding dirt road, moving uncertainly through the dripping dark while his eyes searched a little desperately for shelter. The patched blackness around him was formless, but parts of it seemed blacker than other parts, and instinctively he headed for the blackest patch of all for it made him think of a cave.

It was a cave of sorts, for entering it took him miraculously out of the rain. Then a final, feeble display of lightning showed him that he was in a shed housing farm machinery.

He sank down in a corner in his sodden clothes, as miserable, it seemed, as he had ever been in his life. Then he thought, *No, I've been in a worse spot than this. Much worse. A thousand times worse. But where?*

His memory carried him back only to the Glendale station. Ginny said he'd been running, but he was unable to recall that part of it. Instead his mind leaped on to their arrival at the Westlake station, and he had a sharp vision of the two determined policemen crossing the platform to the train. He hadn't the least

doubt now that they'd been looking for him.

But how had they known that Jan Riggs—if that was his name—would be on that particular train? He hadn't known it himself until a minute or two before he went on board.

Of course, someone could have spotted him at the Glendale station and told the police, and it would have taken only a quick phone call to tell the Westlake police to be on the watch for him. But that sounded too easy. And what of the men in white jackets by the van? His capture must be very important to somebody, to judge by all the effort being made to find him.

Suddenly his wet clothing felt icy and he began to shake with a chill. It was a dreadful feeling, made all the worse by the knowledge that there was something frightening in his life that was beyond his power to remember.

The headlights of a car swept through the rain and touched the front of the shed. They wavered on the unevenness of the road, then steadied and came directly for the shed's square opening. Jan stared at them, knowing all at once how it felt to be a trapped animal. The car stopped, and abruptly he leaped to his feet and darted behind one of the pieces of machinery.

Someone got out of the car, and he was astounded to hear a familiar voice call his name. It was Ginny.

"Jan!" she repeated. "Jan! I know you are here. Please come out—Pops and I have come to take you home!"

It was like a sequence in a dream. He hardly believed it, even when he stumbled from the shed, teeth chattering so that he could not speak, and glimpsed her in a rain cape with the car lights behind her. He was so glad to see her he almost cried. Then in the next breath a tall elderly man was throwing a blanket about him and helping him into the rear of the car, where a small boy sat watching owlishly.

They were well away from the shed before Jan managed to stammer, "How—how d-did you ever find me?"

"Promise you won't tell," said Ginny.

"I p-promise."

She gave a happy little laugh. "We'd have found you sooner, only we had to go home first and get Otis. Otis can find anything."

3

WANTED

The car swung past a shopping area at the edge of town, stopped briefly at a traffic light, then started cautiously down a sloping residential street where torrents of rainwater overflowed the gutters. The rain had almost stopped. Jan, peering through the car window, was startled to see a building on his left that seemed vaguely familiar.

Suddenly the truth hit him. “Hey,” he burst out. “I was here earlier this evening—at that church we just passed. I was talking to Father Dancy when Sergeant Bricker came, and—and I had to run. But I heard enough to learn I was a wanted criminal.”

Heron Rhodes, who had hardly spoken except for a mumble or a grunt, pulled the car to the curb and braked it.

Now he said, “If you were a criminal, son, you wouldn’t be confessing it quite so soon, and anyhow Ginny would have known it. You’d be surprised how far off she can spot a phony or a rat. Er, did you find out why you were wanted?”

“No, sir.”

“Hm. Tell me everything you said to Father Dancy, and everything you heard Bricker say about you.”

Jan had no trouble repeating every word of it, for it would have been impossible to forget it.

Heron Rhodes grunted. “After you learned where we lived, why in double tarnation did you run off in the opposite direction and hide?”

“Because, well, I mean if I was really as dangerous as that policeman seemed to think, I—I sure didn’t have any business going to you and Ginny for help.”

The old man snorted. “I’ll give you a top grade for ethics, and a big zero for judgment. You should have hightailed it straight to the farm. We’d have picked you up on the way, and no one would have known beans about it. But now we’re in for trouble.”

“But why, Pops?” said Ginny.

“Because, pet, we’ve lost some time, and I can’t possibly learn all I need to know from Jan before we have Bricker to worry about.”

“But I still don’t understand. How can Sergeant Bricker—”

“Because,” said Heron Rhodes, sending the car swiftly down the street, “this happens to be the only white vintage Rolls in the county. Everybody knows it, especially the police. They know when I arrived at the station to meet you, and when we left after the excitement over Jan. They saw us come back into town

with Otis, and they already know we're headed for home with another person in the back seat, because we passed a cop at the top of the hill, and he waved to me. Bricker knows Jan sat with you on the train, and that he asked the priest where you live. It won't take him long to put it all together, then he'll be burning up the road to the farm."

The car ran a red light, whirled into a highway that was fortunately empty, and began to fly. Heron Rhodes snatched up the car phone, called a number, and said, "We've got him, Hecuba, and he needs hot soup and a change of clothes. Lay out some of those things you picked up for our Tremaine cousin. They ought to fit. And we'll have to work fast. That devilish Bricker has his nose on the trail, and he may be out to see us."

It seemed they had gone much farther than the five miles the priest had mentioned when Jan finally glimpsed a stone wall on the left. And a very long stone wall it was, for he guessed they drove beside it for at least a half mile before Heron Rhodes swung through an open gateway. At the end of a winding lane the car stopped before a large, rambling old stone house nearly hidden in the trees.

A tall white-haired woman in a green smock, whom Ginny called Aunt Heck, met them at the door. She was nearly as tall as Heron Rhodes, and had the same sharp nose and lively, intent face. She gave Jan's arm a friendly squeeze, and said, "Heron, I put his things in the little bedroom off the library. Why don't you help him change, then bring him to the kitchen. We'll all have something to eat together while we talk."

"Good thought. I want to give him a quick once-over anyway."

"Can I watch?" said Otis, speaking for the first time.

"You may not. But you may help with the questions later."

Jan was thrust across the broad entrance hall, through a huge room lined with books, and into a small bedroom dominated by a towering four-poster. An assortment of new clothing was laid out on the bed.

While he stripped down and toweled dry, Heron Rhodes went over him hurriedly, prodding and tapping and giving an occasional grunt.

"You're kind of scratched up, son. That happen this evening?"

"Yes, sir. I banged into a tree when I was running through the woods."

"Hm. Doesn't seem to be anything to worry about. Have you got a sore spot? Do you ache anywhere?"

"No, sir."

"Hm. Roll your head around. That's right. Does it hurt? No? Hm. You seem to be in good shape. I can't even find an old bump on your noggin. Now, get into some of these new jeans and let's go into the kitchen. I know you're pretty tired, but you'll feel better when you eat, and I want you to hold up till we find out all we can about you."

Jan swallowed. "Why—why are you going to all this trouble to help me? I could turn out to be something you wouldn't want around."

The old man chuckled. "I doubt it. You're not what you're supposed to be, and that's enough to get me going. Anyway, I've a strong suspicion Ginny senses something about you she isn't telling, something downright terrific. So you see, I'm all whetted up."

The kitchen was a broad, old-fashioned room with a beamed ceiling and a

fireplace large enough for him to stand in. He sat facing it at a big round table by the window, eating hungrily while the others speculated about the contents of his pockets, which were being passed around. Otis, so small he had to sit on two cushions to reach the table, gravely followed the progress of the pearl-handled knife from one hand to the other.

When the knife finally came to him, Otis scowled at it, then blinked his owlish eyes. "This ain't his knife," he declared. "He stole it!"

"Otis!" Hecuba Rhodes exclaimed. "That's an awful thing to say!"

"But it's true," Otis replied matter-of-factly. "An' he stole the money, too. Ask Ginny."

Ginny suppressed a giggle. "Otis is right, sort of. That isn't Jan's knife. Why, *look* at it, Pops!"

"I've been looking at it," said Heron Rhodes. "Jan would never choose a thing like that for himself. It's too big for his hand. It has only one blade and it's sharp as a razor. It's a dangerous weapon, and only a thug would carry it."

"But he stole it," Otis persisted.

"Sure," said Ginny. "Just like Pops stole a gun and some food from the enemy, that time he was an escaped prisoner of war. Otis, *appropriate* is a much better word to use."

"Okay, he appropriated it an' the money, 'cause, well, he *was* sort of an escaped prisoner. Right?"

Heron Rhodes nodded. "Right. But let's not waste time with matters we already know about. It's obvious Jan escaped from somewhere, or the police wouldn't be after him. Let's get to something more important. Jan, why did you tell Father Dancy that your name was Riggs?"

"I—I don't know. It just came."

"*Is* it your name?"

"Somehow I don't think so. I don't like it."

"Hm. There has to be a reason you used it, and a reason you don't like it."

Hecuba Rhodes said, "That's almost elemental, Heron. The name Riggs has been impressed upon him in a hateful way. It's even possible he was mistaken for someone named Riggs—although that poses another question: Why does he remember Riggs instead of his own name?"

Heron Rhodes nodded sagely. "Very good, Doctor. I think you've hit upon something."

"I'd feel better," she told him, "if I knew the cause of his amnesia. Evidently it wasn't physical."

He shook his head. "Nope. I couldn't find a thing wrong with him except a few bumps and scratches he acquired after leaving the train." Heron Rhodes paused. Seeing Jan's questioning look, he said, "Amnesia, son, is loss of memory. Lots of things can cause it—a bump on the head, shock, illness, mental trouble.… You don't seem to have anything wrong with either your body or your mind, so I'd say you've had a shock of some kind. Now, if we can discover the cause of the shock, or find out your name—"

Jan said, "Maybe Ginny can help. It didn't take her any time to learn that I'm called Jan. Maybe if she tried for the last name—"

"I'd better try it later," she told him. "It would take too long now. First names are easy—a person *is* his first name, see? You hear it from the day you're born,

and that's the way you think of yourself." She turned to her grandfather. "Pops, why don't we try the word game with him?"

"Regress him!" Otis interrupted. "Regress him!"

Jan looked from one to the other, bewildered. Ginny, as if sensing his confusion, giggled and said, "Jan, you've fallen into the clutches of a pair of mind gobblers. That's what they've been called. Both Pops and Aunt Heck are doctors, specializing in the mind. Otis wants them to regress you. That means they'll have to hypnotize you, and then—"

"No!" he cried, springing up, trembling. "No!"

"Whoa, there," Heron Rhodes said gently, rising and touching him reassuringly. "You're skittish as a young colt. Nobody in this house is going to put you under hypnosis without your permission. My word on it! Now, sit down, son, and help us get on with this before the law interrupts us."

Jan sank back into his chair. Ginny said, "The word game, Pops. Shall we try it?"

"Not yet, pet. We're on to something. Jan's as scared of hypnosis as I am of rattlesnakes. I wonder why? Anybody who's been hypnotized, or has seen it done, knows there's nothing to it. Why, you can't even hypnotize a person unless he's willing. Jan, why are you so afraid of it?"

"I—I don't know, sir. The moment Ginny said what she did, something inside my head sort of turned over. It was an awful feeling."

"Hm." The doctor's long fingers drummed on the table. "This is getting more interesting every minute. Hecuba, I'm wondering about the same thing you are. Why does he remember Riggs instead of his own name?"

"I can think of some unpleasant reasons," she replied. "Jan, let's go back to the station, just before you and Ginny left the train. What scared you suddenly and made you run away? Was it the sight of Sergeant Bricker coming to get you?"

"It must have been. I mean, I just saw two policemen coming across the platform. One of them may have been Sergeant Bricker. I don't know what he looks like, because I didn't see him close up at the church. I just heard his voice."

"He's a young man with a bald head, and he used to be a professional football player. Actually he's acting as chief of police, since our regular chief resigned. Now, think back carefully. Did you just have a feeling he was coming after you? Or was there something about him that frightened you?"

Jan closed his eyes. Again he saw the two uniformed figures crossing the platform. The burly one in the lead must have been the sergeant. "Well, it could have been the sergeant that set me off. He walked like he meant business."

"He always does," said Ginny.

"But—but there was something else," Jan went on slowly. "There was a white van or something on the other side of the platform, and—and there were some men in white jackets waiting by it. I don't know why, but it sort of gave me a turn."

"I didn't notice the van," Ginny said. "Too many things were happening. Did you see it, Pops?"

"Nope. I'd just reached the platform to meet you when Bricker yelled and started to run. Hecuba, who in town has a white van?"

"Well, Carleson's Bakery has one. And I've seen Oscar Carleson use it to meet his wife when she comes back from shopping in the city." She paused and looked

oddly at Jan. “But somehow I don’t believe it was a bakery van you saw. Do you?”

Before Jan could answer, Otis suddenly announced in a dramatic whisper, “The fuzz! He’s comin’ up the driveway now!”

4

SHOCK

It was beyond Jan to understand how owlish little Otis knew Bricker was arriving, but the others accepted the announcement without question.

Heron Rhodes stood up quickly, snapping his fingers and scowling, then said, "We'd better go into the library, folks. And Jan, I want you to go to bed immediately and pretend you've had it. You're exhausted and suffering from exposure. This is just a precaution, in case the sergeant is all fired up about taking you into custody. Let's get a move on!"

Jan ran to the bedroom, threw off his shoes, and was just crawling into the huge bed with his clothes on when he heard the chimes ring in the hall. Hecuba Rhodes scooped up the extra clothing from the spread and tossed it all into a closet. Coming over to the bed, she smiled suddenly and drew the sheet up to hide the collar of his denim shirt.

"He may insist upon seeing you," she said. "So keep your shirt hidden. And suck in your cheeks so you'll look real sick. I'll leave the door slightly open so you can hear what's going on."

She went out, leaving the door ajar, and now he could hear voices in the hall. They moved into the library.

"Yes, Doctor, I've come for the Riggs boy," came the strong, forceful tones of Sergeant Bricker.

"Riggs, did you say?" Heron Rhodes' voice was mellow and quizzical. "Dear me, I've no one here by that name."

"He probably gave you some other name, being what he is, but I know you've got him. It's my duty to arrest him. Where is he?"

"Arrest him for what? There's got to be a charge."

"The charge they gave me was assault and robbery. They—"

"Who gave it to you, Sergeant?"

"The Glendale police. But the charge is only part of it. He escaped from one of the state institutions—"

"Which one?"

"Doctor, they didn't say. They just told me the kid's extremely dangerous, and they want to get him back behind bars just as quickly as possible."

"Sort of hush-hush, eh?"

"Sort of. But I've run into this sort of thing before."

"And you don't think it smells of fish, Sergeant?"

"Sir, I've my duty to do, and I think you'd better turn the boy over to me

immediately. Don't you realize what a danger he is to you and your family?"

"Why, I wouldn't say that. Just stayin' alive in this world is a risky business. Can you give me a description of this Riggs boy?"

"Slender, dark, kind of foreign-looking. He was wearing jeans and carrying a large pearl-handled knife and about fifteen dollars he'd stolen from a guard."

"Well, the boy we brought home this evening looks a little like that, but I'm afraid I can't allow you to have him. He's in bed, suffering from exhaustion and exposure."

"Let me see him! If he's the Riggs boy, I'm placing him under arrest."

"Not as long as he's under my care. Surely you know your law, Sergeant. You're not allowed to touch a patient against a doctor's orders."

"Okay, okay," came the hasty reply. "You win on that. But at least you'll let me have a look at him, won't you? I want to be able to identify him."

"Of course," Hecuba Rhodes said sweetly. "But you're not to speak to him or disturb him. Is that clear?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Very well," she replied. "He's in the bedroom here."

Jan, chewing nervously on his knuckles while he watched the door, sank down into his pillow and closed his eyes. At the last moment he remembered to draw in on his cheeks. Evidently his appearance had the right effect, for he heard only a grunt from Sergeant Bricker, then silence. Voices, when he heard them again, came from the library.

"That's the Riggs boy," muttered the sergeant, a certain satisfaction in his tone. "I got a glimpse of him when he ran off the station platform, and it's the same kid Father Dancy at the little church talked to later. The kid ran down through those woods by the park, and I figured he might stop at the church when he got caught in the rain."

Sergeant Bricker paused a moment, then said accusingly, "Now kindly tell me why you say he isn't the Riggs boy, when he told Father Dancy that Riggs was his name!"

"Because," Heron Rhodes said gently, "he really isn't the Riggs boy at all, in spite of what he told the priest. My sister and I examined him, and we know. We are medical specialists. The boy is confused, and he's obviously been through a shocking ordeal of some kind. And it's just as obvious that there's nothing criminal or dangerous about him."

"But he attacked a guard and stole—"

"Self-preservation. I also once attacked a guard and appropriated certain articles in order to stay alive. Sergeant, there's something rotten behind this I don't like. I don't like it at all! If you can't smell a fish by this time—"

"Oh, I smell a fish all right—and he's lying right in yonder in that big bed! The kid's probably faking it! They warned me about him—said he was as smart and sly as they come. They said—"

"Sergeant, forget what they said. Just listen to me—"

"You listen to me! I don't want to be hard-headed, but you two are stuck out here in the country, lost in your research, and you don't know what's going on in the world. If you could see some of the lousy punks I've had to handle—and they all look so innocent that butter wouldn't melt in their dirty mouths. I'm trying to tell you you've got a monster on your hands. If you're fools enough to keep him

for the night, don't blame me for what happens!"

There came the angry thump of retreating footsteps, followed by the explosive slam of the heavy front door. Seconds later Jan heard a car motor start up and roar away down the lane.

Heron Rhodes called, "Jan, come on out. Everybody back to the conference table. We've work to do!"

It was getting late and Jan had been on the edge of exhaustion, but the jangling shock of Sergeant Bricker's visit had driven away all thought of rest. As he took his seat in the kitchen he looked uneasily at Ginny, and was rewarded by a quick smile. The smile suddenly astounded him, for he had momentarily forgotten she was blind.

"But I'm not really blind," she reminded him, instantly picking up his thought. "I'm just able to see in a different way. We—we're all sort of different here, as you'll find out, so, well—you tell him, Aunt Heck."

"She's trying to say that you're one of us," Hecuba told him. "And you are, my dear. You fill a void that—"

She was interrupted by Heron Rhodes saying, "First, I want everybody's impressions. Then we'll—hey, where in double tarnation is Otis?"

"Comin'" said Otis, hurrying into the kitchen and climbing upon his double cushions. "I was just tryin' to see the van."

"Eh? What van?"

"The white one," the small boy said matter-of-factly, blinking owlishly at nothing as if looking into the distance. "It was down at the end of the lane, sort of waiting. It's gone now."

"I'll bet it wasn't the bakery van," Hecuba Rhodes commented, with a lift of her eyebrows.

"Naw. It was the same one that was waiting at the station when Ginny came with Jan."

Heron Rhodes scowled and drummed on the table with his long fingers. "I don't like this," he muttered. "I don't like it one little bit. Ginny, what did you pick up from Bricker?"

"Something about a favor, Pops. Oh, he's honest. I mean, he wouldn't take a bribe. But he's been made to feel that if he handles this right about Jan, he'll please somebody high up, and that they'll do a favor for him some day. And that's not all."

"What's the rest of it, pet?"

Ginny adjusted her dark glasses, and rubbed a freckle on her cheek with a dainty finger. "Pops, Jan is *awfully* important to somebody."

"Hm. But of course, he must be. Do you know why?"

"Well, sort of."

"Then out with it!"

"But—but I promised Jan I wouldn't—"

"Jan," said Heron Rhodes. "You tell us."

"But he doesn't know!" Ginny wailed. "Not the way he is now. And I promised him I wouldn't pry and find out. All I know is that he's got something terrific. I mean it's a *dilly!* He's really got two talents, but I don't think anyone suspects the other one."

Jan gaped at her in bewilderment, then her aunt patted his shoulder

reassuringly. “It’s all right, son,” she said. “All of us here have our little oddities the world doesn’t know about, and of course I knew you had yours the moment I saw you. It sort of vibrates from a person, if you know what I mean, though it does take someone like Ginny or myself to detect the vibration. So you see, you really are one of us—and especially so because you fill a dreadful void left by the loss of our cousin—” Suddenly she gasped and said, “Heron!”

“What is it, Hecuba?”

“Call Jackson Lane immediately and tell him to be here tomorrow before noon without fail.”

“Eh? What’s up?”

“Heaven preserve us, I don’t know what’s up, but it just hit me like an avalanche. The back of my mind says we’ll need Jackson Lane’s help by noon tomorrow.”

“Hm. Has to be something legal. I’ve had a feeling I ought to get Jackson in on this. He’s got a couple of good Sherlocks on his staff we could start using right away.”

Heron Rhodes reached for a telephone on the bay window behind him, and dialed a number. There was no answer. He glanced at Otis.

“F’sh’g,” mumbled Otis, his mouth full of cookies. “Bim—Bim—”

“What?”

Ginny said, “He’s trying to tell you Mr. Lane flew to Bimini to go fishing.”

“Now why in double tarnation would he do a silly thing like that when I need him? How’m I gonna—”

“Call the Zorns,” Hecuba suggested. “Milly is his secretary, and Bill does his leg work. They’ll get him back here.”

“They’d better,” growled her brother, flipping through a phone book.

While the doctor was concentrating on the phone, Jan fingered his new clothing, curious about it, and said to Ginny, “I’m afraid I’m going to cost your grandfather a lot of money. It doesn’t seem right.”

“Aw, don’t be silly. He’s sure got it to spend, and there’s nothing he’d rather spend it on than something like this. He just loves it.” Ginny touched a freckle on the end of her nose, and added, “You are wondering about the Tremaine cousin.”

“Why—yes,” he admitted, again startled by the ease with which she could pick up thoughts.

“It—it’s awfully tragic,” she said in a small voice. “You—you tell him, Aunt Heck.”

“It’s hard to talk about,” Hecuba Rhodes said quietly. “Poor Juan Tremaine was our last remaining relative—and we didn’t even know of his existence till last summer.…”

She shook her head, and Ginny said, “My mom and dad found out about him when they were in Switzerland doing some research for Pops. They’re doctors too, and they’re back in Switzerland now, finishing up. Anyway, poor Juan’s father died in Vietnam, and nobody even dreamed he’d left a wife and son somewhere. Pops put detectives on it right away,” Ginny added, “and the first thing they learned was that the wife had died too, and nobody knew what had happened to Juan.”

Hecuba said, “Heron and I were wild. You see, all our abilities come from the Tremaine side of the family. Juan’s father was amazingly gifted, and we were

certain Juan would be too. But such gifts, my dear, too often dry up and vanish in the wrong surroundings. Many a child is born with some extraordinary ability, only to lose it by being whipped or laughed at by people who don't understand him. So, what with foster homes and orphanages, we were afraid …"

She stopped and wiped her eyes, and Ginny said, "They found him at last—he was in some sort of orphanage near Washington. Aunt Heck went out to buy clothes for him while Pops rushed to Washington. But—but before Pops could get there …"

There was a silence. Jan said, "What happened?"

"Those stupid authorities!" Hecuba Rhodes bit out. "They were transferring Juan and some of the boys to another place, and they refused to hold him. Before Heron could reach Washington there'd been trouble on the bus, it was wrecked, and Juan was killed."

In the silence that followed, Jan sat with lips compressed, thinking, *How strange. Here I am wearing Juan Tremaine's clothes, sitting where he would have sat, taking his place.… Why should it be this way?*

His thoughts were interrupted by Heron Rhodes thrusting the phone aside and saying with relief, "Finally got Jackson. Told him to charter a plane if he had to, but just get here on time. Wanted to know what in suffering Halifax it was all about, and I said I wouldn't know myself till tomorrow. But at this point I'm pretty sure I do. Hm."

Ginny said, "What is it, Pops?"

"Trouble," said the doctor. "Just plain trouble. So we'd better get on with this. Let's see—where were we?"

"We were talking about Jan's talents," Ginny said. "Don't you think we'd better try the word game on him?"

"We may not have to, pet. We've already used words that brought instant responses, so we know how he feels about hypnosis, the police, guards, and a white van. Now, let's check over what we've learned about him. One: He was being held prisoner in a place he hated and was afraid of. Bricker mentioned a state institution, but I've a feeling it was a private one. Two: He managed to escape by attacking a guard and taking his knife and money, and using some of the money to buy a ticket on the first train passing through Glendale. Three: The place he escaped from obviously wants him back badly and is willing to spend money to find him. They worked fast. It didn't take them long to find out he was headed for Westlake, and by the time the train pulled into the station they had it all set up with the police, with their own van and guards waiting. That van must have broken all records to get to the station ahead of the train. Hm."

"Pops, what institution is near Glendale that Jan could have escaped from?"

"Lordy, pet, it would be hard to say. Must be half a hundred between here and the city, probably more."

"That many? Why, I had no idea!"

"Oh, that takes in all sorts of small sanitariums, private hospitals, state and local institutions and asylums. There's the state asylum near Marysville, just west of Glendale—"

"My goodness, Jan's not crazy!"

"You don't have to be crazy to be committed. Just poor and different. Now, I wear pink socks all the time—don't feel right without 'em. Pink ties, too. And

your Aunt Heck and I are always doing things that might cause folks to slap us into Marysville. But gosh all hemlock, they wouldn't dare. We're too rich, and have too many degrees. Anyway, we wrote the latest textbook on insanity."

Heron Rhodes paused, one long finger slowly tapping the table. Suddenly he said, "Jan's knife proves he escaped from a private asylum. No guard at Marysville would be allowed to carry a pig-sticker like that one. So—tough guard, tough place. There are a couple like that near Marysville. One's an experimental place—don't know much about it, but I don't like what I've heard. Jan could have come from there. It's a long hike from that area to the Glendale station, but Jan must have made it. He was so exhausted and hungry—"

"Pops," Ginny interrupted. "Why can't he remember what happened before he got to the station?"

"The station was his goal, pet. Until he got there, running and hiding all the way, it was just a continuation of the old nightmare. But the Glendale station meant the start of a new life. Now, if we could just get into this matter of names, why he told the priest his name was Riggs …"

"Regress him!" Otis said eagerly. "Please, Pops, regress him!"

Hecuba gave a sudden firm "No!" Then she said, "Heron, I've a suspicion Jan has already been regressed—and progressed—beyond endurance. What he needs now is sleep. Perhaps in the morning, when he's had a good rest …"

The world ceased to exist the moment his head touched the pillow in the great bed. Formless things pursued him through an eternal blackness, but he did not open his eyes till a small hand shook him awake. He sat up instantly, and saw Otis blinking at him.

"Pops says to get dressed fast," Otis told him. "It's mighty near noon, an' the fuzz is comin'."

Jan flew into his clothes. As he ran into the library, where Heron Rhodes and his sister stood waiting, he heard the ringing of the front door chimes.

"That's Bricker," Heron muttered, snapping his fingers. "Now what in triple tarnation is holding up Jackson Lane?"

"People can't always do as you order," Hecuba reminded him. "Are you going to answer the door?"

"No!"

The chimes rang again. This was followed by a heavy pounding. "Let me in, Doctor!" Sergeant Bricker called sternly. "I've a court order for that boy!"

At that moment the tall clock in the library began to strike the Hour. It was a deep, reverberating sound, and to Jan it was like the knell of doom. Abruptly he ran past Heron Rhodes, whirled into the hall, and started for the kitchen with the intention of escaping by way of the rear door. But he was hardly through the hall when he was confronted by Ginny.

"No!" she said, spreading her arms to stop him. "No! You can't get away. There are policemen all around the house. Come back to the library—maybe Pops can figure out something. If only Mr. Lane would come!"

"He's comin' now," announced Otis, who had been peering through the curtains of one of the narrow hall windows. "There he is, stopping by the white van."

Jan chilled. "That—that van's out there?"

"Sure," said Otis. "Now Mr. Lane's talking to those men who came in it. The

fuzz is with 'em."

Jan became aware of the low voices of men outside. They were approaching the door Once more the chimes rang.

"Heron?" a deep voice called. "This is Jackson Lane. Can you hear me?"

"I hear you, Jackson," Heron Rhodes replied, swiftly crossing the hall. "I'll open up for you, but not for the police!"

"Heron, confound it, you can't ignore a court order! And that's not all. For the safety of your family, let the police inside. That boy's deranged. He's a monster! He's already killed seven people!"

5

VAN

For a dreadful moment Jan stood with his mouth hanging open, incapable of thought or movement. Then blind instinct made him whirl about and try to bolt from the hall. But the long arm of Heron Rhodes caught the back of his shirt and held him.

"Easy, son," the old man said reassuringly. "Don't believe every tomfool silly thing you hear, even if it comes from a good lawyer. Just keep a tight rein on yourself for a minute, and we'll see this thing through."

Heron opened the door a few inches and said, "Jackson, I've no intention of butting my head against the towering wall of the law. But before I turn this boy over to anybody, I want to see that court order with my own eyes."

Jan heard a muttered conversation beyond the door, and the doctor was handed a piece of paper.

The doctor squinted at it through his glasses, and grunted. "So! Signed by that fellow Roundtree. Says I'm to turn over to constituted authority—that can't be you, Sergeant Bricker, because you have no authority beyond the city limits, which doesn't quite extend to my stone wall. Anyway, it says I'm to turn over the person of one Brice Riggs, criminally insane, an escapee from Marysville.... Hm!"

Heron Rhodes passed the paper to a heavy square figure that Jan glimpsed through the partially open door. "Jackson, you tell that bunch out there that the court order doesn't apply here. First, there's no one in this house named Brice Riggs. Second, no one in this house is insane, criminally or otherwise. I should know."

The doctor paused and peered at the assembly outside, scowling. "Jackson, I smell an enormous rat here. It stinks to heaven. You tell that bunch to get off my property, or I'm calling the sheriff! In the meantime I'm calling Marysville and getting the straight of this!"

Jan could hear quick voices outside, followed by the deep voice of Jackson Lane raised in protest. Abruptly the door was pushed open, Heron Rhodes was thrust aside, and men invaded the hall. The move was so unexpected that Jan stood frozen for an instant, then he leaped away from a bulky figure in a white jacket and tried to dodge another coming at him from the side. His dodging served only to place him within range of Sergeant Bricker's powerful arms.

The instant Bricker caught him Jan went wild. In an explosion of fury he kicked, scratched, bit, and used thumbs, fists, and elbows with such unexpected force and speed that Bricker was thrown off balance and fell. Jan squirmed eel-

like out of the other's grip, but in the next breath was caught in a more expert fashion by a guard in a white jacket. He promptly gave the guard a bad time, for the fellow cried out, "Quick, George, use the hypo! The kid's gone nuts!"

"No you don't!" Heron Rhodes shouted. "Don't you touch that boy with a needle!"

Jan, panting with exertion, glimpsed the other guard moving swiftly upon him with an outstretched hypodermic needle. While he fought to avoid it, he watched with a sort of horror as the point of the needle went quickly toward his shoulder. With all the power of his mind he tried to stop it. Miraculously it did stop. Then he gasped and momentarily forgot to fight as the hypodermic suddenly shattered into a thousand pieces.

The guard cursed, but instantly took advantage of the incident to shove Heron Rhodes and Jackson Lane aside, and seize Jan around the legs. With Sergeant Bricker helping, the three men hurriedly took their squirming prisoner outside and heaved him head-first into the back of the van. Before Jan could move the door was slammed shut and locked. Seconds later he heard the abrupt roar of the motor, and felt the twisting movement as the vehicle shot swaying down the lane.

It was some time before he got his breath and was able to sit up. Only now did he discover that the van was padded inside, which alone had saved him from being badly bruised when he was thrown into it. As he looked around at the padded interior his earlier fury was replaced by a black foreboding. This van, obviously, was specially made for transporting violent people. He swallowed at the thought. Was he really insane, as the police and guards certainly believed? And had he actually killed seven people?

"No!" he cried, springing up with returning fury and hurling himself like a caged young panther against the door. "No! It's a rotten lie—and Dr. Rhodes knows it!"

"Take it easy, kid," came a voice from the front. "You can't get out. The strongest guy in the world couldn't."

Jan whirled and glared at the impassive face of the guard named George, peering at him through the upper part of the partition, which was covered with heavy steel wire.

"Where are you taking me?" he demanded.

"You ought to know. You've been there before."

Jan sank down again, his foreboding returning. Suddenly he remembered the peculiar thing that had happened to the hypodermic needle. Had he actually managed to stop it? Certainly he hadn't caused it to go to pieces. Then he realized that the guards were also wondering about it, for he could hear them discussing it.

"Right in my hand it did that," said the heavy-faced George. "First it stopped. I couldn't move it! Then it exploded—only it wasn't exactly an explosion. It just went *pfff!* Right in my hand! Yeah!"

"I know there was something mighty funny-queer about it," replied the other, who was driving. "But with that wildcat back there to hang onto … Say, you don't reckon the kid himself caused it, do you?"

"Dunno. Maybe. They say he's got a real twist to him, besides being a killer. Anyway, he's Big Doc's prize, so we'd better report what happened to the

needle."

Big Doc's prize, was he? Jan ground his teeth and tried to project his mind forward to what ought to be a familiar destination, but it was like plunging into a seething blackness. He recoiled, and sought a better mental route to travel. But before he could find one to his liking, he heard George mutter, "Harry, I think we've got a tail. Watch that second car behind us. The little blue one."

"You could be right. I'll turn off at the next road, and then come back. If he stays with us …"

The van turned, traveled a short distance, and backed into a dirt road and waited. Jan peered curiously through the partition, and glimpsed a small blue car go past the intersection. When it was out of sight, the van returned to its former route on the highway.

Presently George said, "Here he comes. But he's staying farther behind now. Tell me, who'd want to tail us?"

"Not the cops," Harry growled. "Big Doc's got 'em in his pocket. It has to be some snoop in the pay of that Rhodes guy. He's a kind of doc himself, and he's sure latched onto that kid. Big Doc wouldn't like that."

"We'll have to ditch him. Still, if he's got our tag number—"

"It won't help him. I changed tags before we left the Center. Big Doc said not to take any chances. And they won't learn anything at Marysville. Big Doc has all the records. I'm turning at that road ahead. Hang on!"

Jan was thrown violently from side to side as the van abruptly left the highway and went careening at high speed along a winding country road. Unconsciously, as the van's course became more erratic and his fear of what lay ahead increased, he began playing a mental game he must have played many times in the past. It was born of a wish to be somewhere else, and the game's success depended upon the reality of the vision he could bring to his mind.

At the moment, more than anything else on earth, he wanted to be back in the pleasant safety of Heron Rhodes' library. He closed his eyes, saw the blue-carpeted room with enticing clearness, and fervently wished himself there.

Something seemed to whirl in his head. Then came a sharp sound, a sort of snap of air being displaced, and instantly the van's wild motion ceased. The rough texture of the padding beneath him now had the softness of a thick Chinese carpet. Almost in fear Jan opened his eyes.

He was back where he wanted to be. Heron Rhodes and Hecuba and Otis and Jackson Lane were staring at him in astonishment. Ginny alone was smiling.

"I knew it!" she cried, clapping her hands. "I knew it!"

Heron Rhodes said softly, "Great galloping Caesar's ghost! No wonder they want him!"

"Of course!" said Hecuba, with equal softness. "And there are certain groups on our planet who would pay anything to have him—if they could control him."

"Yes," Heron agreed. "You've put your finger directly on it."

Jackson Lane had heaved his short, square bulk from a chair while he gaped at Jan. His mouth worked soundlessly for a moment, then he blurted in his deep voice, "How—how in the name of heaven did you get here?"

"He teleported," little Otis said loftily.

"Nonsense!" rumbled the lawyer. "I don't believe in such things."

"Seeing should be believing, Jackson," Heron Rhodes put in quietly.

"I've seen you and Hecuba do a lot of things in the past fifty years I didn't believe in," Jackson Lane muttered. "Naturally I've kept my mouth shut, but I still remember those blackbirds you used to point your finger at when we were kids. You'd say *'Pow!'* and they'd drop over dead."

"I've always been sorry about those birds," the doctor admitted. "But it's the eye that does it, not the finger. In the Middle Ages I'd have been burned—" He stopped abruptly, then said, "Jan, I destroyed the hypodermic, but I didn't stop it. The only person who could have done that is you."

"Me?" Jan repeated. He was still in a state of semishock over what he had accomplished.

"Yes, you. Why, that fellow couldn't move his hand! I was tempted to use my little weapon on him and his friend, but happily I didn't. It has a devastating effect on humans unless one is very careful, and things were happening much too fast. Anyway, Ginny was right about you. You have two talents, which makes you a very special person. I might say three, the way you fought those rascals. You really put up a fight!"

Chuckling, Heron came over and helped Jan to his feet. "Son, I can't wait to hear what happened in the van. I want you to tell us—"

"Not now," Hecuba interrupted. "The poor boy hasn't had a bite since last night, and here it is afternoon! I'll tell the cook—"

"No!" Heron said quickly. "Just have her put snacks on the table for all of us, then send her home. Not a soul must know Jan is here. After we've eaten, we'll have to hide him, or at least keep him out of sight when someone comes. I don't want a word about him to get out to anyone—the help here, those on your staff, Jackson—except possibly Bill Zorn…."

"Why Bill?" Jackson Lane asked, as Hecuba left the room.

"Because he's already on the case. Hecuba and I had a hunch something like this would happen today, so I had Bill come before you got here, and wait across the road in his car. He was to follow that white van. I'm certain it didn't come from Marysville."

Jan said, "Does Bill Zorn drive a small blue car?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Because somebody in a small blue car did follow the van, but those guards spotted him. They were trying to get away from him when I—left."

"If they spotted him," said the lawyer, "then they probably got away. Bill's a top investigator, but tailing cars isn't his strong point. I'm sure he took their license number, but I doubt if that would help us."

"It wouldn't," Jan told him. "They'd switched plates. I heard them talking about it."

"What else did you hear?" Heron Rhodes said eagerly.

"They—they were taking me to what they called the Center. It seems I escaped from there."

"Did you get any idea of its location?"

"No, sir. But someone they called Big Doc is in charge."

Hecuba, returning, said, "Not another word till he eats. The snacks are ready, and the cook's gone."

As they filed into the beamed kitchen with its big round table, Jan heard

Heron Rhodes mutter, “Big Doc. Hm. Big Doc. I’ve never heard anyone called that, but somehow it strikes a bell. It makes me very uneasy.”

“Why, Pops?” said Ginny.

“Blessed if I know, pet. But this thing’s bigger than I thought. A lot bigger.”

“Pops, if those people find out Jan is back here with us, what do you think they’ll do?”

“They’ll try to kidnap him—but they’ll make sure he’s drugged so he can’t get away.”

6

HIDING

They had finished eating and were going over the details of Jan's account for the third time when Otis slid off his chair and started out of the room.

Hecuba Rhodes said, "What is it, Otis?"

"Bill's comin'," said the small boy. "Gonna let 'im in."

Jackson Lane looked blankly around the table. "How the dickens does that little fellow know someone's outside?"

"He just knows," said Ginny.

"And he can find people," Jan put in. "He found me last night after I'd run away from the train. I was hiding in a shed 'way over on the other side of town."

The lawyer frowned, then the creases in his square face deepened. "I don't believe in this sort of thing," he rumbled. "Never did, in spite of what I've seen. But why couldn't Otis help us locate that Center where Jan was being taken?"

"Oh, I'm sure he could find it in time," Heron Rhodes answered. "But it might take him months. You see, the boy's range is only about a mile. Last night we had to circle around half of Westlake before Otis picked up the scent—if you want to call it that."

"Pops," said Ginny, "what makes you think this thing about Jan is so much bigger—"

They were interrupted by Otis coming back into the room with a pale, studious-looking young man in tow. The young man nodded politely to those at the table, then shook his head at Heron Rhodes.

"Sorry, sir. I did my best, but I goofed it. They got away."

"Never mind, Bill," Jackson Lane told him. "Their victim, er—escaped." He motioned to Jan. "Here he is, back with us."

Bill Zorn blinked at Jan. "But—but this is impossible, sir! Soon as I lost them, I drove back here as fast as I could. How—"

"He used a dif'rent route," small Otis said, with a perfectly straight face. "An' quite speedy."

"It's rather involved," Heron Rhodes added quickly, "so we'll explain it to you later. Right now, Bill, we need answers to some questions, and we need 'em fast. Pour yourself a cup of coffee, and draw up a chair."

"And Bill," cautioned the lawyer, "not a word about Jan to anyone, not even Milly. No one is to know that he's here. Understand?"

"Of course, sir." Bill Zorn looked curiously at Jan, shook his head, then poured his coffee and sat down. "If he's kept hidden here, do you think he'll be safe?"

"No," Heron Rhodes said shortly. "He's much too valuable to someone. I expect, Jackson, you'd better hire guards. We should have at least two around the clock. They can bunk over at the guesthouse behind the lab."

"Okay. What do you want me to tell 'em?"

"Don't mention Jan. Just say I've become concerned about my grandchildren, Ginny and Otis, and think it's time they had protection. And it *is* time, dadburn it! I've almost forgotten what a devilishly wicked world we're living in."

Heron turned and scowled at Bill Zorn. "Haven't you got a fingerprinting outfit?"

"Sure. It's out in the car."

"Then get it and take Jan's prints. I want you to hightail it over to Marysville with them and check them with the prints of someone named Brice Riggs. That was the name given on the court order that Bricker had."

"But—but Doctor," Jan interrupted, "those guards said—"

"—that Big Doc had all the records. I know. I know. But fingerprints are different. I don't know how Marysville handles their cases, but the criminally insane are often fingerprinted by the receiving officer for later identification in case of trouble or death. See what I'm driving at?"

"Of course. But what if Jan's prints match the Riggs prints—if they have them?"

"It'll prove only that the switch was made somewhere else. Jan is *not* Brice Riggs. To find out who he really is, you may have to trace Brice Riggs and learn if there really was such a person, and what happened to him. And while you are searching, keep tuned to these leads: Jan was being taken to a place the guards called the Center, run by someone they spoke of as Big Doc. Now hurry and take those prints, then get going."

The fingerprinting was done in short order. When finished, Bill Zorn placed them in his case and started away. But at the door he stopped abruptly.

"There's one thing bugs me. Why would anyone go to the trouble and expense of trying to make one boy pass for another, and tag him as a dangerous criminal?"

Heron Rhodes said, "Quite simple, Bill. Before they took Jan away, you were watching the house and van through your glasses?"

"You bet I was!"

"What time did they take Jan out of the house and drive away with him?"

"About ten after twelve."

"What time was it when you lost sight of them and gave up the chase?"

"I'd say around twenty to one."

"Bill, Jan was back here *before* twenty to one. How do you suppose he managed to do that?"

Bill Zorn stiffened. His mouth came open. "But—but—good lord! That's impossible. Unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless teleportation is a fact."

"With Jan it's a fact. And the people who can control Jan, and make him do their bidding, can become very powerful indeed. You see? It's rather frightening to realize what we may be up against."

Heron shook his head. "On your way, Bill. I want some answers."

Jan was given the bedroom off the library for his own, and told to remain in it and keep the door locked when the servants were about their morning duties.

"Not that our help can't be trusted," Hecuba Rhodes told him. "They certainly can. They're all members of Angus McCoy's family. Angus runs the farm, and he's been with us twenty years. But so long as they don't know you are here, they'll act normally and give the right answers if strangers ask questions."

Then Hecuba added thoughtfully, "Now, tomorrow's Sunday, so only the cook will be here. That's Aggie, Angus' sister. But she'll finish up before ten and leave for the day. So the coast will be clear till Monday morning, when Tillie McCoy vacuums downstairs. I hope Ginny's practicing—"

Ginny said, "I always practice in the library in the morning, and I guess I do make a lot of racket. But if—"

"Don't stop because of me," Jan said quickly, remembering how she loved her music. "I—well, I sort of like the piano."

He was rewarded by a grateful smile that vanished on the instant when Hecuba said, "I do think, my dear, that you ought to cancel your lessons in Glendale until we can get Jan out of danger. I never did like the thought of your going over there alone."

"Oh, no!" Ginny wailed. "We're just getting into Spanish music, and if you only knew how much I—" She stopped abruptly. "I—I'm sorry," she went on apologetically. "I'm just being selfish. If staying home will help Jan, of course I'll stay! Do—do you really feel I should, Aunt Heck?"

"I honestly don't know how I feel," Hecuba admitted, with an uncertain shake of her white head. "I wish to heaven I did. I'm very uneasy. I know something's going to happen. In fact, something's bound to happen, for it won't take this Big Doc creature—whoever he is—very long to decide that Jan must have come back here. But what will he do? Somehow I can't put my finger on it." She shook her head again, and looked at Ginny. "Oh, I suppose you might as well continue with your lessons—but don't go alone. If we can't get guards enough to spare, I'll arrange to have Angus drive you over and bring you back."

Jan fell asleep wondering what Big Doc was like, and awoke to the sound of the piano being played softly but beautifully. He splashed water on his face in the little bathroom, dressed quickly, and quietly opened the door to the library.

For a few seconds he stood motionless, watching Ginny's small fingers racing over the keys. The song was hauntingly familiar, and unconsciously he began humming the tune.

Suddenly her fingers stopped and she turned toward him. "Morning! You—you know what I was playing?"

He nodded. "*La Golondrina*." Lightly he sang a few measures:

Sale en abril de la costa africana
La golondrina que de aqui se va …

Her mouth came open, and for a moment she seemed to be studying him curiously behind her dark glasses. Almost in a whisper she asked, "Jan, who taught you that?"

"My mother."

"What was she like?"

"She—she—" He closed his eyes and clenched his fists in the effort to recall

the vague and momentary vision that had come to him, but it was gone. Helplessly he shook his head.

"I just love the music; but—but what's *golondrina* mean?"

"Swallow. The song tells how in April—"

"Jan! Don't you realize your mother must have been Spanish?"

"Maybe so." He shrugged. "What of it?"

"What *of* it?" she exclaimed. "My goodness, it's a clue! You're beginning to remember! If you can just—" She stopped abruptly as if listening, and her mouth worked soundlessly.

"W—what's the matter?" he asked.

"I was just talking to Otis. He says the coast is clear and you can come and have breakfast with us."

"You—you were talking to Otis? But how?"

"Oh, just sort of mentally," she said lightly. "We've always been able to do it."

"But great Jupiter, that—that's amazing!"

She giggled. "Not a tenth as amazing as being able to teleport. Oh—Otis says Bill and Mr. Jackson Lane are here." She hurried and opened the front door just as the chimes rang, admitting a frowning lawyer and a very tired Bill Zorn.

Heron Rhodes met them and ushered them through the house to the big round table in the kitchen. "Bill just got in," Jackson Lane rumbled. "He didn't learn much. I'm afraid Saturday wasn't the best day to go to Marysville."

"No day is a good day to go there," Heron Rhodes said grimly. "Hecuba and I have tried to bring reforms, but when you have to deal with some of these unhallowed politicians …" He shook his head and asked, "What did you pick up, Bill?"

"Nothing about Brice Riggs, sir. Not a thing—and I got my nose into every file there. You'd almost think Brice Riggs never existed."

"He existed somewhere. Our job is to find out where. Go on, Bill."

Bill Zorn rubbed his tired eyes, and drank some of the coffee Hecuba poured for him. "Well, I did learn that Marysville is a sort of clearinghouse for unusual cases. Unofficially, that is. I mean, they're so crowded that they're glad to let private institutions, qualified ones who are doing research, borrow patients to study."

"I know that," Heron Rhodes told him. "We've 'borrowed' an occasional patient from them ourselves, every one of which we've helped. Did you get a list of the other borrowers?"

"Sure did." Bill Zorn produced a small notebook, opened it, and slid it across the table.

The doctor adjusted his glasses and scowled at it. "Hm. I know all these places, and most of the people that run them. The one place I had my doubts about, the Orchard Nursing Home, isn't even on your list. But Pine Ridge Sanitarium is—and that's the most exclusive and expensive private asylum in this part of the country. I can't imagine any hanky-panky going on there. Are you sure there are no other doctors like myself—private doctors, I mean—who could be borrowing patients?"

"I thought of that," Bill Zorn said, "and I'm having a friend of mine check into it. That's Joe Hinkle, who used to be on my basketball team in high school. I didn't know he was working at Marysville, but I found him over in the

bookkeeping department. He's okay. And I told him just enough to get him anxious to help. So if there's anything to be found, Joe'll dig it up."

"Excuse me," said Jan, breaking in. "But what about Big Doc and the center? Did—did you happen to—"

"Oh, I told Joe about that," Bill Zorn replied. "The only Center he could think of is the Geriatric Center next to the Glendale Hospital. But that's for the elderly, and anyway the van was heading away from Glendale when I followed it. As for Big Doc, he's going to keep his ears open."

Heron Rhodes gave a nod of approval. "Let us pray he hears something soon." He glanced at the lawyer. "What about those guards, Jackson. Could you find any?"

"Heron, I could locate only two at the moment. They are retired policemen, and they promised to be here by six this evening. Guards—trustworthy ones—are hard to find right now, but I hope to have some more by Wednesday."

"Oh, you've got to!" Hecuba urged. "I've the most awful feeling about what lies ahead…."

"Stop worrying, my dear," the lawyer rumbled. "We'll get this cleared up soon. Yesterday, right after I left here, I went to see Roundtree—"

"That scuttling old turtle!" Heron growled. "Judas would have made a better judge."

"Probably," Jackson Lane agreed. "Anyway, I wanted to track down the authority that pressured him into issuing that court order for Jan. He swore it came direct from the superintendent's office at Marysville. Maybe it did, but I told him we'd checked with Marysville, and no one knew anything about an escapee named Brice Riggs, and I further told him that this whole thing was beginning to look like a conspiracy, and that we might have to call in the FBI. That shook him up a bit. Then I went around to have a talk with that Sergeant Bricker."

"Eh?" Heron Rhodes stared at him. "What in the dingalated tarnation did you go and see *him* about?"

"Sort of thought we could get his help."

"His *help!* Why, that self-righteous rascal—"

"Easy, Heron." The lawyer gave a deep chuckle. "We need his help, and I figured he'd be only too glad to give it when I told him a few facts. I soon had him crawling when I pointed out that Marysville knew nothing about Brice Riggs, and that he'd made an illegal entry here yesterday and had aided and abetted a very serious crime. It could cost him his job. So, he's working for us now."

"Doing what?"

"As acting chief of police," the lawyer explained, "he's got all the facilities of the police department at his fingertips. He can talk directly to any police department in the country and get any information they happen to have. Since only state residents are admitted to Marysville, it shouldn't take him long to dig up something about Brice Riggs. The same goes for Jan's fingerprints."

"Well!" said Heron. "I hadn't thought of all that. Maybe we can get somewhere now." Then his long fingers began to drum upon the tabletop, and he shook his head. "I just wish I could remember why that name, Big Doc, seems to strike a bell. It worries me."

Big Doc loomed in Jan's tortured dreaming that night as a great dark, hairy ogre, with pudgy fingers and a soft but frightening voice. He awoke trembling, and heard the tall clock in the library ponderously strike four times.

He sat up, his fists knotted in the sheet, knowing that somehow the dream vision of Big Doc must be close to reality. Hate rose in him. Big Doc was a thief who had destroyed whatever he had been and stolen his memory. Hate boiled above his fear and washed away what remained of the night, so that it was almost daylight before he fell asleep again. He was awakened finally by the unaccustomed sound of the vacuum cleaner that Tillie McCoy, the maid, was using in the hall.

Somehow, with the help of books Ginny selected for him in the library, he got through the long day. Tuesday was much the same. If he could have been free to go outside and explore the farm, the waiting would have been easier, but he was practically a prisoner in his room, always forced to flee to it and lock the door to avoid being seen by a chance visitor or one of the servants. As the hours dragged, his uneasiness increased. As Hecuba Rhodes had said, something was bound to happen. But what?

Several times he crouched by his window, peering carefully through the curtains at the courtyard behind the house. On one side was a stone addition that he judged was the research lab, while facing it across the walks and the flower garden was the garage. The buildings at the far end, he decided, had to be guesthouses. Through the trees he could glimpse barns and other stone structures in the distance.

It was not hard to guess who the people were who occasionally crossed the courtyard. The aproned woman who usually appeared in the middle of the afternoon had to be Agnes the cook, Angus McCoy's sister, while the younger one was probably Tillie, his daughter. The short, sturdy bowlegged man, who twice came to talk to Heron Rhodes, was no doubt Angus himself. A second man dressed in workman's clothes, who puttered watchfully about patching the stonework, must be one of the guards who had come Sunday evening. Jan wondered about the extra guards that Jackson Lane had been trying to get. So far they hadn't arrived.

They had not arrived by Wednesday afternoon, when Ginny left for her music lesson.

From his window Jan watched her small, slender figure move lightly across the courtyard beside the sturdy bulk of Angus, who was driving her to Glendale in Hecuba's station wagon. Only her white cane and dark glasses gave indication of her blindness, and again he wondered by what magic she could make out the world, and how strange it must appear to her.

It was when the station wagon was gone that a sudden, deeper uneasiness came over him. Hecuba had been worried about the lack of guards, but having the extra guards didn't really matter. What mattered was something else, something they'd overlooked. What could it be?

He tried to shake off the feeling, but it clung to him and grew worse with the evening. In the library, while they were waiting for Ginny's return, he caught Heron Rhodes studying him with some concern. Heron told him, "Don't let Big Doc get you down, son. We'll settle with him soon. My word on it."

He shook his head. "It—it's not what you think," he managed to say. "I mean,

well, I—I have an awful feeling that we've missed something. It's kind of like a chess move that could get you checkmated."

Heron's eyes sharpened on him. "Evidently you know how to play chess. Hm. Now think, son. What sort of move would it be?"

"Sort of a round-the-corner move, like you'd do with a knight. It—it has to do with Ginny."

Hecuba gasped. "Ginny? Oh, my heavens! Otis, call your sister—see if she—"

"Aw, she's okay," Otis said with mild disgust. "I been talking with her right along. She's just left, an' she's going over now to get in the car." He glanced at Jan, and said aloofly, "If you're so smart, see if you can beat me at a game of chess." Without waiting for a reply he trotted over to a gaming table beyond the piano and took a box of chessmen from a drawer.

Otis was about to dump them on the table when his small body stiffened and his owlish eyes became great marbles of fear.

"No!" he gasped. "No! No!"

The chessmen dropped from his nerveless hands and spilled upon the carpet. Suddenly he ran to Hecuba and clasped her tightly, sobbing, "They've got her! Men in the car! I can't hear her, Aunt Heck—they've got her!"

Heron Rhodes shook his head once, then sprang to his feet and snatched up the phone on the desk. His finger spun the dial once. "Operator!" he barked. "Quick —this is an emergency! Get me the Glendale police!"

7

HOSTAGE

The tall clock in the library struck a deep and somehow doomful note, then slowly it struck another, and another, and another.… Jan counted the strikes without realizing what he was doing. Ten o'clock. Four hours had passed since Ginny had been kidnapped.

He chewed on his lip and looked again over at Otis, who was huddled miserably in the recesses of one of the big leather chairs. Heron Rhodes, grimly pacing the floor in front of him, stopped and looked also, silently asking the question they had been asking for hours. The small boy shook his head.

Heron muttered, "We won't hear from her till the drug wears off. They must have given her as big a dose as they gave Angus. The stupid fools! Half would have been more than enough!"

The Glendale police had found the Rhodes' station wagon on the edge of town, with Angus, drugged and suffering from a blow on the head, lying on the floor behind the driver's seat. Angus, Jan had been told, had no idea what had happened. The farm manager had gained consciousness hardly an hour ago, and was able to say only that someone had called to him by name from a passing car, and when he turned to see who had spoken he was suddenly struck from behind.

All this seemed rather odd to Jan. How could Big Doc have known about Angus, or that Angus would drive Ginny to Glendale on Tuesday? Unless, of course, Big Doc had become familiar with the establishment of Heron Rhodes long before that chance meeting with Ginny on the train last Friday. But why would Big Doc have ever had any interest in Heron Rhodes?

Somehow it didn't make sense. Unless …

Jan shook his head and looked across the room at the desk where Jackson Lane and Bill Zorn were waiting for the first message from Big Doc. They had come immediately when Heron called, and were followed quickly by Sergeant Bricker, who had brought a recording apparatus to attach to the phone.

In their concern for Ginny, it seemed that no one had thought to tell Bricker about his return. At the sight of him the sergeant, after a shocked stare on entering, had demanded, "How the devil did you manage to get away from those people and come back here?"

"I just managed," he'd told Bricker, and Heron Rhodes had added, "For safety's sake we thought we'd better keep it quiet. And please, Sergeant, we want to keep this quiet, too. Don't let it get out to the papers."

"You have my word on it, Doctor. I—I'll do everything I can to make up for my

blunder. All we need now is a yard full of reporters to foul things up." Bricker frowned and said, "Er, there almost has to be a connection between what happened to this young fellow, and Ginny being snatched. Don't you think so?"

"It would appear that way, Sergeant. But so far we haven't heard a word from the kidnappers."

"Well, I'm sure you will soon. I'll fix the phone, then I'll have to hurry back to meet Nat Martin. He's on his way out from the city now. Did Mr. Lane tell you about him?"

"Something was said about a State Bureau man you knew."

"Mr. Lane figured we'd better call him in. It'll be unofficial. Martin's the best there is—used to be with the FBI, and they still consult him."

Bricker had made speedy work of attaching the recorder. On the way out he'd paused uncertainly and said, "I'm sorry, young fellow, about turning you over to those guys the other day. But honestly, I thought—"

"It—it's all right, Sergeant," he'd told Bricker. "A man has to do what he believes is his duty."

Bricker, obviously grateful, had suddenly grinned and given him a pat on the back. "Boy, did you put up a scrap!"

That had been two hours ago.

The matronly cook, Agnus McCoy's sister Aggie, came in with a large tray of sandwiches and snacks that she placed on a table beside a stack of paper cups and plates. Behind her appeared Hecuba with a fresh pot of coffee.

Hecuba, whose eyes were looking haunted, said, "Thank you for helping, Aggie. This may be an all-night session, so maybe you'd better go home and look after Angus."

"That I will, ma'am, though it's not Angus what worries me." The cook shook her head, dabbed at her eye with a corner of her apron, and started away after giving Jan a quick sidelong glance full of curiosity. "You need me later, ma'am, just you call me and I'll be right over."

"Thank you so much, Aggie." Hecuba went around and touched Otis on the cheek. "Young man, it's long past your bedtime."

Otis thrust out his jaw. "I ain't goin' to bed. I ain't goin' no place till I hear from Ginny."

Heron Rhodes said, "Oh, leave him be. We may need him."

"Of course," Hecuba murmured. "I sometimes forget those two are telepaths. They're so quiet about it."

Heron sank down on the sofa beside Jan. He rubbed his eyes and muttered, "You handled Bricker just right, son. He's not a bad sort, but it wouldn't do for him to know too much about us." He was silent for a while, then his hands clenched and he said slowly, "You see what's coming, don't you?"

Jan nodded. "I—I see it. Ginny is just a hostage. They'll use her to get me back."

Heron nodded. "It has to be that."

"Well, I'm ready to be traded. Any time." He tried to make his voice sound confident, but it was far from the way he felt.

"You're very brave, son."

"I'm not brave. But I have to do it. There's no other way to get Ginny back."

"Hm. But even, if we make the trade, they might not return Ginny. Have you

thought of that?"

"Yes, sir. I've been thinking of it. I've a feeling that once Big Doc—whoever he is—gets his hands on me, he'll try to keep both of us."

"What makes you feel that way?"

Jan chewed on his lip a moment. "Well, it's several things. If they believed Ginny was really blind and couldn't see anything, why did they bother to drug her?"

"Hm!" Heron looked startled. "Go on, son."

"Then there's Angus. There's no reason why they should even know him, especially if they're interested only in me. But they knew him—they even called him by name—and, well, how could they possibly have learned ahead of time that he was going to drive Ginny to Glendale today? She usually takes the train. Anyway, if the extra guards had come, they would have driven her."

"I see."

"So, well, it sort of looks like Big Doc knew a lot about the Rhodes family before I ever came here."

"Good lord! I hope to heaven you're wrong!"

"I sure hope I am too. But when you think about it, Ginny would be just as valuable to Big Doc as I am. I mean, what she can do is amazing. If he's found out about her, and figures he knows how to control her …"

"God forbid! But first he'd have had to learn the truth about her, and I don't see how he could have managed it. You're the only person besides the family who knows."

"Doesn't Mr. Lane know?" Jan asked, nodding across the big room toward the lawyer and Bill Zorn in deep discussion near the recorder. "He knows about you and your sister."

He doesn't know everything about us," the doctor said quietly. "Jackson and I grew up together, and he realized early that what he'd learned about us had better remain a secret. Even his wife doesn't know. As for Ginny, he may suspect she has odd abilities, simply because she's a member of an odd family. But I doubt if he knows the truth—and I'm certain he'd never allow himself to mention a word about any of us to a soul."

Heron Rhodes paused. He was grimly silent for a moment. "Of course," he went on finally, "it's possible that Big Doc knows far more about us than I've supposed. I overlook the fact that certain countries are spending huge sums to investigate and develop people like us—we'd be worth billions to them in time of war—and that Big Doc could be over here on a search for talent. In that case I'd be high on his list as a possible source of material. The European medical fraternity certainly knows of my interest in unusual minds. We could have been watched for months."

"Maybe that's it," said Jan, though he was far from convinced, in spite of the doctor's logic.

Heron Rhodes sighed like a man in pain. "I—I don't know, son. I just don't know. It's hard to think right now. I'd rather be dead than lose Ginny."

Jan swallowed. In the short time he'd known Ginny, she had come to mean more to him than he would ever have thought possible.

"You're not going to lose her," he managed to say.

"I wish I could believe you," the doctor muttered. "But something tells me

exchanging you for her isn't going to work."

Hecuba, restlessly pacing the library, paused before the sofa. "What isn't going to work, Heron?"

"Exchanging Jan for Ginny," the doctor told her. "I'm sure he'll keep them both."

She nodded. "I feel that too. So the smart thing, I believe, would be to hang on to Jan and refuse to make an exchange. That would give us time to locate Ginny. If we put our heads together, surely we can think of *something*."

"No!" Jan protested, springing suddenly to his feet. "No! That's the wrong thing to do! If you refuse to exchange me, you'll never see Ginny again. They'll take her out of the country, and come after me later. Can't you understand?"

He stopped, looking from Hecuba to her brother, and then at Jackson Lane, who had crossed the library and was standing scowling at them.

"What's all the fuss?" the lawyer rumbled.

Heron Rhodes told him.

The burly lawyer shook his head. "Now just simmer down," he ordered. "You're away ahead of yourselves. We don't even know for sure who took Ginny. It could be just a straight kidnapping, and have nothing at all to do with Jan. Don't forget, Heron, you're not known as a poor man. Now, until we hear from the people who took Ginny, there's nothing to do but wait. And after we hear, we'll let Nat Martin make the decisions." He frowned at his wrist-watch. "He ought to be here any time now."

Heron Rhodes grunted. He tapped his fingers on his knees, then impatiently heaved his lean form to his feet and began pacing the library. Presently he returned, and was about to sit down again when a small sound from Otis caused him to straighten.

Jan, still standing, looked quickly at Otis. The little boy was sitting up in his chair, eyes wide and staring into space while his mouth worked soundlessly.

Otis suddenly whispered, "She's awake.… She—she's sorta sick, an' I can't talk to her very well. She …"

The abrupt ringing of the telephone cut Otis short. It was not a shrill sound, but in the immediate stark silence of the library it sounded shrill and terribly demanding.

Heron raced toward it. Just before he reached it, Bill Zorn said quickly, "Remember, it's connected to an office speaker as well as a recorder."

The doctor grunted and snatched up the receiver. "Yes?" he said, like a man holding his breath.

From the speaker a rough voice ordered, "Lemme talk to Johnny."

"Eh? Johnny who?"

"Ain't this Johnny's Pizza Hut?"

"No!" snarled Heron, and slammed the receiver down.

The doctor turned away, muttering to himself. Almost on the instant the phone rang again. He whirled and caught up the receiver a second time.

"Yes?"

"Dr. Rhodes?"

"This is Heron Rhodes."

"We have Ginny. Now listen carefully."

"I'm listening."

The voice that came from the speaker had a slightly foreign accent, and it was hard to tell whether it was a man's or a woman's. "This is the only call we will make to you, Doctor; it is coming from a pay station, so you can forget about tracing it. If you want Ginny back, you must leave the police entirely out of this, act immediately, and do exactly as you are told. If you fail to do so, you will never see her again. Is that perfectly clear?"

"I understand you," Heron growled. "What's your deal?"

"Get in your white Rolls with the Riggs boy—"

"What in triple tarnation are you talking about?" Heron interrupted angrily. "I haven't anyone here named Riggs!"

"Don't be a fool, Doctor," the voice said coldly. "The boy under discussion is with you now, and don't waste time denying it. Take him to the Midway Plaza shopping center on the Glendale highway, and drop him off at the southwest corner by the theatre. He is to be in the phone booth next to the theatre by exactly eleven o'clock to receive a call. Have you got it?"

"I've got it, blast you! But what about Ginny?"

"You'll be told where to find her in the morning. The Plaza is a twenty-minute drive from your house, so you'd better start immediately. When you have dropped the boy at the theatre, you are to drive on to the northwest corner of the parking area and wait under the last light for a half hour. Don't leave before then, and don't make the mistake of bringing another person with you."

There was a click as the caller hung up.

For seconds after the connection had been broken, Heron stood clutching the receiver, his face white and drawn, his free hand clenched. He seemed caught between fear and explosive fury. Then slowly he replaced the receiver and his haunted eyes stabbed around the room.

"What in God's name am I to do?" he asked bleakly.

"Take me to the Plaza!" Jan cried instantly. "Can't you see? It's our only chance!"

Heron turned and tried to speak, but before words could form Otis gave a small cry and scrambled from the chair where he had been sitting so long.

"The fuzz!" he gasped. "An' the Bureau man's with 'im!"

8

EXCHANGE

The small, slender, gray-haired man that Sergeant Bricker brought into the library and hurriedly introduced was quiet of voice, steely-eyed, and had a mouth so thin that it seemed only a bloodless slit across the lower part of his face. He carried a black bag, and his manner was that of a person who had all the time in the world. But his narrow eyes darted quickly from face to face, and then swept the room and fastened instantly on the recorder.

Jackson Lane said, “Thank heaven you’re here, Martin! We’ve just had a call from one of the kidnappers. They’re holding Ginny and demanding that we turn Jan over to them in exchange. It has to be done immediately!”

“But those devils will keep them both!” Heron Rhodes bit out. “I’m sure of it!”

“So this is a hostage deal,” Nat Martin said in his low voice. “Let me hear the recording.”

Bill Zorn played it for him.

The State Bureau man listened carefully, his eyes closed. When it was over he stood a moment in thought, then looked at Heron.

“This doesn’t give us much time, Doctor. Can you tell me why Jan is so valuable to them?”

“They want him because he has an extremely rare ability that would make him immensely valuable in espionage to a foreign power.”

Nat Martin’s only reaction was to close his eyes slowly, then open them. “I see. Has your granddaughter also a rare ability that would make her valuable in the same way?”

Heron’s jaws knotted. “She has. And I pray everyone present will treat this as a top-secret admission, and forget you ever heard it.”

Nat Martin nodded. “Then there’s no question that they’ll keep her. And from the tone of the recording, I’d say she won’t be kept in this country long. Surely not long enough to trace her by the usual methods. So there’s only one thing to do.”

Martin came over and touched Jan on the shoulder. “Bricker’s told me a little about you,” he said in an almost gentle voice. “I realize you’ve had it rough. Are you game for this?”

“Of course I’m game!” Jan said impatiently, and glanced nervously at the clock. “But we’ll have to hurry!”

“Right.” Martin calmly zipped open his bag, and with quick fingers took from it a thin disc and a roll of adhesive tape. “Lift your shirt,” he ordered. “I’m going

to tape this little transmitter to the small of your back. It hasn't much range, but it gives a signal I can follow if I can manage to stay within a quarter of a mile of you. When they pick you up—it'll probably be in a car this time—I want you to remove it without being seen and stuff it behind the seat. Now, one more thing …"

Deftly he taped the tiny transmitter in place, then took another small object from his bag. "This is a voice transmitter," he went on. "It's small enough to fit into the pocket of your jeans without being noticed. It's switched on now and ready for action. After you enter the phone booth and get your instructions, I want you to call me and let me know what they tell you to do. Someone may be watching, so put the thing on the shelf and pretend you're still talking on the phone after your caller hangs up. It's a two-way job, so if there's a question you have to ask, you must press this button to hear my reply. Don't take it with you when you leave the booth. Just leave it there and I'll pick it up later."

The State agent paused, and Hecuba said, "Jan, it's chilly outside, so you'd better wear this jacket. It'll help hide that thing under your shirt."

He slipped gratefully into the cotton jacket that went with his jeans, and put the transmitter in a side pocket. "We—we'd better go," he said, with a glance at the clock.

"Two more things," said Martin, not to be hurried. "First, I'll need someone to ride with me and help with the direction finder so I can keep track of Jan. Not you, Bricker—you're still in uniform."

"I'll go," said Bill Zorn. "I know how to handle the thing."

"Good! Doctor, have you a phone in your car?"

"Yes. Want my number?"

"Right, and I'll give you mine. We may have to keep in touch."

They exchanged numbers, and Martin said, "I'll follow you at a safe distance and park within sight of the theatre. Let's move!"

Jan started for the hall, but hesitated as he saw Hecuba looking at him, eyes moist. Suddenly she stepped forward and gave him a quick hug, holding him close. "Bless you!" she whispered. "I'll be praying for you!"

Wordless, he clung gratefully to her a moment, then swallowed and hurried after Heron.

Fear did not come until the speeding Rolls left the country road that went past the farm and shot into the Glendale highway. Then fear crept numbingly through him as if a deadly drug had been forced into his veins. So many things could go wrong, and it would take only one of them to put him back in the hands of that unknown creature they called Big Doc.

The doctor, as if sensing his dread, said firmly, "We're going to lick those rascals, son. No matter what happens, keep that thought in mind. We're going to catch 'em and get you and Ginny back. It may be only a matter of hours, or it may take a day or so. Martin will need help—he's probably phoning for it now—but it'll take a little time to locate you and set things up. So think tough, son, and don't let anything throw you."

Jan mumbled that he wouldn't.

Heron said, "I can't shake the feeling that Big Doc's path has crossed mine somewhere. If I just had his name, or a description of him …"

"I know what he looks like," he managed to say.

"Don't tell me you're beginning to remember him!"

"No, sir. But I keep dreaming of a man that I'm sure is Big Doc. It has to be, because it's always the same man, and I wake up scared."

"Describe him, son."

"He's big—not exactly tall, but real big, and sort of flabby. And he's got a short, dark beard, kind of pointed, that covers the lower part of his face. His voice is soft. When he gets mad, he doesn't raise it like most people do. It just gets softer."

"Hm! I'd sure know him if I saw him. Does he speak with an accent?"

"I—I don't know. Maybe."

"Could he be French or English?"

"Oh, no, sir. I'd say German, or something like that."

"Well, now we're getting somewhere."

Heron drove for a few seconds in silence. "I've met the rascal. I'm almost certain of it. But where in dingalated tarnation could it have been?"

"Do—do you go to medical conventions?"

"Only to those that deal with certain aspects of the mind. Now, let me think. I was in New York at one a few months back, and I went to another in London early last fall. Don't remember running across anyone like Big Doc at either of them. Then there was Geneva more than a year ago. Hm. That could have been the place. Come to think of it, there was a Viennese specialist—"

Heron broke off abruptly, slowed the car, and swung suddenly into a broad, brightly lighted parking area that flanked the highway in a great curve. "Almost forgot where we were going!" he muttered. "Suffering Caesar, I didn't expect to find it so crowded at this hour!"

"W-what's this place?" Jan asked, staring curiously at the orderly rows of parked cars and the continuous line of modern buildings beyond them. Strung overhead were thousands of bright pennants that flickered gaily in the lights, while lively music poured from hidden speakers.

"Midway Plaza," said Heron. "Didn't you ever see a shopping mall before?"

"I—I don't think so."

"Then you couldn't have been raised in America." All at once the doctor muttered an exclamation, and said, "Yonder's the theatre straight ahead—and we're four minutes late!"

The Rolls shot forward, slowed, and turned at the corner by the theatre, and stopped. Jan fumbled at the door and managed to open it. He could see the phone booth to the right of the small crowd at the theatre entrance, filing in for the late show, and at the same time he was aware that the phone in the booth was ringing.

He felt the doctor's hand grip his shoulder as Heron, voice tight, whispered, "God be with you, son!"

Jan swallowed, stepped out, and ran to the phone booth. There was a cold knot in his stomach as he lifted the receiver from the hook.

"Yes?" he said unsteadily. "I—I'm here."

"You're late!" someone said accusingly in his ear. It was the same person who had given orders over the speaker in the library.

"I'm sorry. W-what do you want me to do?"

As he spoke he drew the transmitter from his jacket pocket and placed it on

the shelf beside the dogeared phone book.

The voice in his ear said, “Go to the main entrance of the mall and walk through to the rear parking area. You will see a taxicab parked by the light, directly opposite the rear entrance. The driver will take you to your first destination. Now, repeat what I’ve told you so there will be no mistake.”

Jan lifted the transmitter from the shelf, held it nearer the phone, and replied, “I’m to walk through the mall to the rear entrance and take a cab that will be waiting for me by the light. The driver will take me to my first destination.”

“You have it,” said the voice. “Now move!”

When the speaker hung up, Jan stood a moment in indecision, trying to think. Suddenly, still holding the phone receiver as if he were using it, he pressed the button on the transmitter and asked, “Did you hear that? Hadn’t I better take the transmitter with me in the cab?”

“Better not,” came Nat Martin’s voice, small and not too clear. I don’t want you caught with it. We’ll be tailing you. Good luck!”

Jan hung up the receiver, slipped the transmitter under the phone book, and hurried down the walk outside. Just hearing Nat Martin, knowing he was near and watching, helped restore his courage. The Rolls was nowhere in sight.

He found the main entrance and began walking through, wondering why so many people were shopping at such a late hour. Then he saw the signs and realized this must be a special bargain night, with prizes and free offerings that had attracted people from all around. How wonderful, he thought, to be safe and free, and have family and friends and be able to wander about in a place like this with money to spend for little things you wanted, and have no worry about the next hour or the next day.…

Then he thought of Ginny, locked away somewhere, alone and sick from the drug she had been given; he clenched his hands and hurried on through the rear entrance.

The cab was waiting where he had been told it would be. As he reached it, the thin-faced driver eyed him sharply and said in a low voice, “Your name Riggs?”

Jan nodded and got inside. “You know where to go?”

The driver grunted, started the motor, and they shot away with a jerk.

“Where are you taking me?” he asked the driver.

“Ardmore,” the man admitted. “Corner Fifth an’ Cherry. That’s where your old man said he’d meet you.”

“Oh.” Ardmore. He had no idea how far it was, for he’d never heard of the place. All at once he wished he’d disobeyed Martin and brought the transmitter with him. Something could go wrong so easily, and for the first time he had a nagging feeling that it would. What if Martin had tire trouble, or got caught in a traffic jam and lost him?

Jan dug his fists into the pockets of his jacket and stared morosely out at the late traffic, and the lights of cheap business districts flashing by. As the minutes passed his courage slowly ebbed and was replaced by the fear that had haunted him earlier. Once, leaning back in the seat, he felt the pressure of the small transmitter taped under his shirt. He felt it carefully, wondering if later, when the right moment came after changing cars, he would be able to remove it quickly and hide it.

He decided he could manage it if they didn’t give him the needle, as the

heavy-faced George had tried to do before they took him away in the van. But why would they bother with that tonight? After all, he was going with them voluntarily this time.

Then, with a feeling of mild astonishment, he remembered he had the ability to stop the needle if need be. He hoped the need wouldn't arise, for it suddenly came to him that it might be well to keep that particular ability hidden.

After what may have been a half hour or more, the cab left the highway and entered what seemed to be one of the older suburbs. Something about it, perhaps the rundown buildings and the general ugliness, added to his dread.

They crossed railroad tracks, swung down past empty store buildings and a warehouse, and stopped on a corner beside a rusted tin structure that might once have been a machine shop.

"Fifth an' Cherry," said the driver.

Jan peered around in dismay. In the gloom of the street lights, the other three corners seemed to be only empty lots filled with debris.

"You—you sure this is the right place?" he faltered.

"I oughta know, bud. I was raised in this town. Funny place to meet a guy, but there ain't nothing to be afraid of."

Jan got out. The driver made a fast U-turn and drove hurriedly back the way they had come. Hardly was the cab out of sight when a door in the side of the tin building creaked partially open.

"Hey, you!" someone called in a low voice. "This way—on the double!"

Sudden anger helped dampen his fear, and he took his time about approaching the door. On the threshold he hesitated, trying to see into the darkness, then a strong hand grasped his arm and drew him inside.

Instantly he felt an awareness of danger, but before he could react to it a wasp seemed to sting him in the back.

He cried out and tried to jerk away, only it was too late now for anything. His body turned to lead and he fell into blackness.

9

PRISONER

He awakened by degrees, painfully struggling to come out of a blackness that threatened to swallow him, yet trying desperately not to make the least movement. Every time he moved the world heaved sickeningly about him. It was like being deathly ill in a tiny boat on a stormy sea.

What had happened to him? Where was he?

He opened his eyes, and closed them quickly against the pain of the light. For a time beyond imagining he tried to think and remember, then very slowly memory came back to him. Midway Plaza … the phone call … the long taxi ride to the tin building … the voice ordering him to the door …

Jan groaned and opened his eyes again. The light hurt, but he squinted against it while he struggled to sit up and take in his surroundings. Resting on an elbow, he waited until the uneasy walls around him steadied, then carefully turned his head.

He was in a tiny room just large enough to contain his cot, a chair, and a table. To his right was a door with a small circle of glass in the upper half of it. On the left was another door, partially open, disclosing a washbowl and a toilet. There was no window in the place. The light came from a half globe in the ceiling.

Suddenly dizzy, he sank down again, wondering how long he had been here. Without a clock or a window, it was impossible to tell whether it was day or night. Then, judging by Ginny's reaction, it came to him that it couldn't have taken more than four hours for the drug they'd given him to wear off, and more likely only three. If it was half past eleven when he entered the tin shed, then it was still dark outside, and somewhere between two and three o'clock in the morning.

All at once an awful thought struck him. He sat up again, clawing under his shirt to locate the little transmitter that had been taped to the small of his back.

It was not there.

He was still sitting up, frightened now, when he heard a key turn in the lock of the door. Then slowly the door opened, and a big man in a rumpled white jacket entered and stood looking at him reproachfully.

There was not the least doubt in his mind that his visitor was Big Doc. There was the great flabby body, the big, round bald head, the short, pointed beard, and the curious feeling of familiarity that had distinguished the dreamed version of the man. Even the plump white hands with their oddly pointed fingers were familiar.

“Shame on you!” the big man purred softly, giving a slow shake of his head. “Running away like that! Tsk! Tsk! Have you no gratitude for what I’ve done for you?”

For a moment Jan could only stare at his visitor, hating him. Then he said hoarsely. “What have you ever done for me?”

“You don’t remember?” The broad face broke into a smile. “I didn’t think you would. Matilda is very efficient. But you *do* remember this!”

A plump hand slipped into a side pocket of the white jacket and came out holding a small object partially covered with adhesive tape. It was the missing transmitter. The thing looked as if it had been smashed with a hammer.

“You should be punished for trying to lead people here,” the soft voice went on. “But fortunately your little tattletale was discovered before any harm was done. So I will not blame you. After all, you did fall into evil hands.” Once more there was the slow shake of the head followed by the clicking of the tongue. “That idiot Rhodes would undo all the good work I have done with you.”

Jan clutched the sides of his cot, trying to steady himself against the room that wanted to revolve around him. Suddenly he wished he had the ability of Heron Rhodes to use the eye as a weapon. Then he was thankful he didn’t, for in his hate he might have turned it on the man before him, with terrible consequences.

“Where’s Ginny?” he demanded.

“She’s quite safe, dear boy.”

“You—you promised to turn her loose if I came back.”

“We did nothing of the kind. We promised merely to inform Dr. Rhodes where she could be found—though I’m sure my associate had no intention of being specific. The name of a foreign country would have been enough.” The big man shrugged and smiled. “He disobeyed our orders, so it does not matter. What really matters is you. You are a very important young personage, and we need Ginny for insurance that you will not run away again. Not only would you be a grave danger to society, but Ginny would suffer. She will always suffer painfully unless you do exactly as you are told. Do I make myself clear?”

Jan half rose from the cot, fists clenched, then fell back and clung to it again as the room tipped drunkenly. Nothing was clear at that moment except that he and Ginny had lost their chance of escape and were now at the mercy of what surely must be a madman.

“You—you’re crazy!” he gasped.

The big man smiled tolerantly. “No, dear boy. I am merely being practical. You have a rare and valuable ability, but you are also the victim of a very difficult mental illness. Among other things you have lost your identity. I have been trying hard to restore it to you, but it will take a long time. Unfortunately it is complicated by—”

“No!” Jan cried. “You—you’re lying! I know you’re lying! You’re trying to make out that I’m Brice Riggs, but I’m not! I never—”

“You *are* Brice Riggs, dear boy.”

“I can’t be! They say Brice Riggs killed seven people! I’ve never killed anyone!”

The big man shook his head sadly. “You should be thankful, my friend, that you have no memory of what you did. God is merciful that way. You have multiple personalities, and you killed under the influence of the most violent one. It has often been dominant. You were put away in a, ah, most unpleasant

institution—for the criminally insane." Again came a sad shake of the head. "A truly frightful place. I would hate to see you sent back there, your mind blanked again."

The big man paused; the little cold eyes in their plump rolls of flesh gave him a meaningful look. "I had great trouble having you released to me. If I had not been who I am, with a name to be reckoned with in these matters …"

"Who—who are you?" Jan asked.

"I am your friend, dear boy. The best friend you have ever had. I am trying to save you from yourself. Never forget that. And never forget that you are Brice Riggs—and not some other personality who would like to destroy Brice Riggs and take over his mind. If I see any signs of such a personality emerging, I will be forced to turn you over to Matilda for further treatments."

The big man smiled, then with a contemptuous flip of his hand he tossed the wrecked transmitter upon the table and went back through the door, closing and locking it.

A moment later the overhead light went out, leaving Jan in darkness.

Jan clung to his cot, fighting a new fear as well as the effects of the drug. The very sound of the name Matilda had sent a chill of pure terror through him. Why? What was there in a name to make it so dreadful? 104

With the lights turned off, the room was completely dark save for the bit of glass in the corridor door, which was now a small, vague circle of gray suspended in blackness. The dark added to his dread. As he thought of the comfort and security of the Rhodes' library, he was almost tempted to make use of his curious ability and go back there, if only for a little while. If he had managed to do it from the van, he ought to be able to do it from this place, wherever it was.

Or could he? He was so weak and upset from the drug they'd given him that it might be impossible. Then he realized it would be wiser to save that move for later, after he'd located Ginny and worked out some sort of plan.

Who, or what, was Matilda? A woman?—perhaps the person who had spoken over the loudspeaker in the library? Somehow he didn't think so. Big Doc had given him the feeling that Matilda was a *thing*.

At that moment, remembering what Big Doc had said, an utterly horrible thought struck him. Was Matilda a machine that was used to blank a person's mind?

Jan began to tremble, and in a sudden reaction to the thought he tottered from the cot, fell against the wall on his left, and felt his way to the open door of the toilet. It was only by accident that his groping, unsteady hand touched a wall switch and a weak light came on in the ceiling. When he returned to the cot long minutes later he left the little light on; its soft glow dispelled some of the terror of being alone with his fears in utter darkness.

Though he felt better now, an inner wisdom urged him to turn off his thoughts for a while and try to sleep. He must have succeeded after a fashion, for when he got up again and went to the toilet he was able to walk steadily and his head was clear. There was no drinking glass at the washbowl, but he held his mouth to the tap until he had had his fill, then splashed cold water on his face. This time, when he returned to the cot, he was wide awake and the circuits of his mind were going at full speed.

Matilda. It had to be a machine. And it almost certainly had to be a machine they strapped you inside, with something like electrodes around it so they could run a current through your head. A special sort of current that would blank out what you were and leave you ready for something new. Sure. He could almost see the devilish thing. It was as clear in his mind as if he'd actually been inside of it.

Then, with a little shock, he realized he *had* been inside of it, because it was all so familiar to him. He'd been inside, maybe several times, and it had robbed him of his past. But he must have rebelled at the last session and gotten away before they'd turned him into Brice Riggs.

Anyway, there wasn't the least doubt what was in store for Ginny. They'd blank out the Rhodes part of her, and leave her a poor little blind girl with no one to turn to but Big Doc or one of his helpers. Then she'd have to do just as she was told. And they'd do the same thing to himself, until Jan—who'd already lost his past—became Brice Riggs, without even a memory of the Rhodes family. He and Ginny were slated to become Big Doc's slaves.

Of course it would take time. Many months, probably. And while it was going on, Ginny would be a sort of hostage to keep him from teleporting to freedom. Unless Big Doc decided to keep them drugged till they'd been taken safely out of the country.

The thought of being drugged again brought Jan to his feet, hands clenched in rising uneasiness. Almost certainly plans had already been made for a quick trip somewhere. These people, if they had any sense, wouldn't risk remaining here any longer than they had to after taking someone like Ginny. If he had any hope of saving her, he'd better start working on it immediately.

He went quickly to the door and tested it, even though he knew it was locked. The latch did seem a little wobbly. Maybe, if he had a screwdriver … His hand shot to his rear pocket where he had been carrying the knife. But the knife was gone, and now he discovered that all his pockets had been emptied.

Somehow he had to get out of here. How else could he locate Ginny?

Suddenly it occurred to him that it might be worth trying to return to the Rhodes' library in the hope of finding Nat Martin there. If he could see Martin, he probably could get a skeleton key or tools to open the door. Then he caught his breath at an idea so simple he wondered why he hadn't thought of it earlier. He could get another transmitter from Martin and bring it here.

But what if the State Bureau man were not there at this hour?

Jan rubbed his eyes, trying to think. If he could just locate Ginny, she could call to Otis and find out about Martin. In fact, she could set the whole thing up so Martin would be ready for him when he arrived and no time would be wasted. He sure didn't want to be late getting back here and be caught with a new transmitter.

He turned and studied the room. He didn't know what he was looking for—just something, anything, that might help him to get out of here so he could explore the building.

Then, glancing into the lavatory, he saw the square of molding on the wall opposite the doorway. It looked as if a small window had been covered over.

He sped to it, hope rising. A hurried inspection showed it to be a two-foot-square molding enclosing what seemed to be a plywood panel painted the same

color as the walls. It was hardly noticeable at a distance; only now, studying it closely, was he able to see that the upper part was hinged.

With fingers that were suddenly trembling he began clawing at the bottom of the panel, which was just above the level of his eyes. In his haste he managed only to rip off the end of a fingernail. The panel was stuck fast.

He whirled, searching frantically for some small thin object he could use as a pry. There was only the smashed transmitter on the table where Big Doc had tossed it.

Three quick steps took him to it. His hand was just closing over it when a small, dull metallic sound made him freeze. Someone had unlocked the door.

He stared at the door, and his eyes widened as he saw the knob begin to turn, slowly and stealthily.

10

VENTURE

Jan stood motionless, watching, holding his breath as the door moved slightly. It moved a little more, a fraction of an inch more, making no sound. Who could be on the other side at this hour, using such care not to attract attention? Surely not Big Doc.

Suddenly for the first time, he thought of the unknown guard he'd escaped from days ago. The unremembered guard whose money and knife he'd taken, and whom he must have attacked and knocked unconscious. How he had managed it he had no idea, but there rose in his mind the vague features of a heavy-jawed man who might be the one he'd fought with. They were not pleasant features, and now it came to him that such a person could be unforgiving and vengeful.

He flattened against the wall, determined to dart into the corridor and run for it if his visitor turned out to be the guard. From his position he could not see the circle of glass in the upper part of the door, so he watched the widening crack as the door very slowly opened.

Then he gasped as a small pale head appeared in the space he was watching. The eyes were hidden behind a large and very familiar pair of curving dark glasses.

"Ginny!" he whispered. "What—how—"

"Oh, thank goodness!" Her small hands were icy as he clutched them, but he could feel her determination rising above her fear. "Otis told me you'd be here," she whispered hurriedly. "I was locked in a room down the hall—I got out by using a trick I'd—but I'll tell you about it later. Come—we've got to get away from this awful place now!" She tugged him into the hall. "Lock your door and take your key with you."

Very carefully he closed the door and locked it, and slipped the key into his pocket. She led the way, her hand clinging to his.

The narrow hall, dim with only a tiny night light near the floor, was carpeted like his room, and their feet made little sound as they tiptoed to some steps leading down. The stairway surprised Jan, for he had assumed they were in the wing of a one-story building.

Ginny came to a halt at the head of the stairs and whispered, "You'd better go first. I have no depth perception, and they left my cane behind."

He remembered she'd mentioned something about depth perception on the train, though he was still vague about what it meant. Firmly holding her hand,

he started carefully downward to an even greater surprise. The stairs ended in a small recess in the corner of a great spacious hallway that he realized was the second floor of an old mansion. Paneled in dark wood, it was vaguely lighted by an Oriental lamp on a table between two ornate chairs. Facing it, a broad stairway spiraled down to what must be the main floor.

Jan hesitated, studying the hall while he listened. He wondered how much time they had till daylight, and was rewarded by Ginny whispering, “I heard a clock somewhere below us strike three just before I found your room.”

He hadn’t heard the clock with his door closed. In fact, in a closed place without windows he hadn’t heard much of anything but the soft flow of air from a ceiling vent. If it was only a little after three, he couldn’t have been unconscious quite as long as he’d thought.

The house was quiet save for a faint snore coming from the other side of the nearest door on their right. There probably was a back stairway somewhere, and he wondered whether to risk hunting for it or to go straight on down and out the front way. The thought of the front entrance made him uneasy, but he decided on it anyway. It would be the quickest route to the street and safety—if there was a street.

The thick carpeting of the hall deadened their footsteps. The great stairway, however, presented an unexpected problem. It squeaked.

It made no difference how carefully and cautiously they proceeded downward, the heavily padded steps squeaked anyway. Then, within a few feet of the broad foyer, lighted by a single wall sconce, a telephone rang in the open reception room diagonally across from them.

From where they crouched Jan could just see past the high arched doorway into the room’s interior. Someone must have been sitting by the phone, waiting for the call, for it was answered immediately. The voice was the same one that had phoned instructions to Heron Rhodes four and a half hours ago, and later given him orders at Midway Plaza. Only now the voice spoke in a foreign language that sounded like German.

The person was still talking when a door opened suddenly on the right of the stairway and the bulky, white-jacketed figure of Big Doc strode with a sort of deliberate slowness across the foyer to the arched opening. Jan’s heart leaped violently at this unexpected turn, and he could feel Ginny’s fingers digging sharply into his arm. Big Doc had only to turn his head and glance in their direction, and they could hardly escape being seen. Yet to attempt flight back up the squeaky stairs would surely attract immediate attention.

The speaker finished talking over the phone. Big Doc grunted and said softly, “Well, Helga?”

“We are to leave,” came the voice of Helga. “We must pack immediately.”

“But that is stupid, my dear! I warned you about calling them. I knew they would panic.”

“It is not panic, Leopold. It is common sense. The boy alone was no worry until he escaped. No one knew about him. But the girl is a complication. Remember, we had not planned to take her till later; then she was to be flown directly to Kiev by way of Havana. But now we have the two together, and we must not endanger the project by remaining here an hour longer than necessary.”

“Oh, nonsense!” the doctor protested, shaking his head. “I see little cause for

alarm. We know the boy was unable to give the Rhodes bunch any information—Matilda took care of that. So how can they trace the girl? This is the perfect place for my work, and your people are completely upsetting it! They have no conception of the preparatory procedures and the time—"

"Leopold!"

"Yes, my dear?"

The tall, mannish figure of Helga strode out of the room's shadow and confronted the doctor in the doorway. She was a stern-faced woman with iron-gray hair, wearing a tailored pants suit.

"Leopold," she repeated coldly, "I am in charge on this side of the Atlantic. Let us have no arguments. I will inform the staff that they must pack immediately. As soon as you are ready, the patients must be sedated for travel. Then—"

"But—but what of Matilda? How—"

"That depends. Clausen has already been alerted that he is to have the helicopter ready, and the fueling stops arranged for. I will call him now and order him to bring it immediately. We will take Matilda if there is room on board. If not, possibly Jenna can have it shipped to us later. Anyway, your first model is still in Kiev."

Big Doc threw up his hands and turned away, muttering to himself. Jan gripped the step where he had crouched and concentrated on Big Doc, praying that the man would not look up or turn his head. Miraculously the doctor, still muttering to himself, passed within six feet of them without becoming aware of their presence. The stern-faced woman remained standing in the doorway a moment, frowning, then turned quickly and disappeared into the reception room.

Jan rose and caught Ginny's hand. "Let's go!" he whispered. "The front door!"

His foot had hardly touched the thick carpet of the foyer when he was jolted by the abrupt ringing of an alarm in the hall upstairs. For an instant he froze, uncertain, but all at once realized they had only seconds to escape and raced to the door, dragging Ginny with him.

The alarm was still ringing when his trembling hand began fumbling with the unfamiliar lock. Ginny thrust him aside and in the next breath had the huge door unlocked and was tugging it open.

Even as they slipped through and drew it shut, Jan was all too aware that they had passed the open reception room in full view of the stern Helga, and he expected momentarily to hear shouts and signs of pursuit. Yet as they raced across the large old-fashioned porch and down to a driveway, he heard nothing but the muted ringing of the alarm for a brief moment before it stopped. In its place there came the vague sound of a voice that seemed to be making an announcement over a loudspeaker.

It flashed through Jan's mind that the alarm had been rung to awaken the staff, and that Helga was now giving orders for the evacuation. She must have been too engrossed in her task to notice that an escape was taking place under her nose.

He could hardly believe their luck. In another minute or two they would be on a street or a road somewhere and could start looking for help or a telephone.

Glancing back, he saw lights snapping on in the house, though the place was nearly hidden by the foliage lining the curving drive. Ahead the drive was lost in blackness, and Ginny was forced to lead the way.

She had gone only a few yards when she stopped abruptly before the almost indiscernible outlines of what seemed to be a great wrought-iron gate. After tugging at the latch she whispered despairingly, “Oh, Jan, it—it’s locked!”

The blackness of the night, the locked gate, and the absence of street lights or any sound of traffic sent his hopes tumbling. No stars shone through the canopy of leaves overhead, and the low rumbling of thunder warned him of approaching trouble. With the discovery of weeds underfoot he realized this entrance had not been used in a long time.

He tugged at the gate and muttered, “We ought to be able to climb it.”

“It’s too tall,” she said. “There’s an arch above it. We can’t get through.”

Feeling his way, he found a stone wall, stood on his toes reaching upward and asked, “How much higher is it?”

“Maybe about a foot. But there are wires running along the top. Barbed wires. I—I don’t think we’d better try to climb it.”

“We’ve *got* to climb it,” he said, wondering how she could possibly see in the dark. “If I can get on top, I can put my jacket over the wires and pull you up, then drop you on the other side.”

He leaped upward, caught the edge of the wall, damp with dew, and easily drew himself to the top. But when his bare hand touched one of the wires he was given a powerful shock that sent him flying backward. His head struck something and he fell into nothingness.

There was a roaring in his ears when he regained consciousness. His head hurt, and his mind was full of confused pictures of Big Doc and Matilda. Then he became aware of a frightened Ginny fussing over him, rubbing his hands and shaking him. 118

“Oh, Jan! Jan! Say something! Are you all right?”

He struggled up on an elbow, and rubbed his head slowly. It still hurt, and the roaring was still in his ears, but Big Doc was fading. “I—I’m all right,” he muttered. “At least nothing seems to be broken. That—that’s a live wire up there!”

“Those awful people!” she whispered angrily.

“How long was I out?”

“Not long. Maybe a minute. Do you feel like walking now?”

He didn’t, but he wobbled to his feet anyway. “You’ll have to lead me—I can’t see a thing. We’ve got to find the other entrance. It must be at the back of the house.”

“I’ll follow the fence,” she told him. “There’s a corner just ahead.”

“How in the world can you tell?”

“It—it’s sort of like radar,” she murmured, as she drew him carefully along the wall. “I mean, I can see exactly what’s there—the outlines and all. But it’s hard to make out how far away it is, and I never know about holes and things. That’s why I miss my cane.”

She stopped and whispered, “We’re at the corner. The wall ends, but a high steel fence goes to the left, past the house. We can’t climb it—it sticks out at the top, with barbed wire on it.”

Caution held them to silence as they crept nearer the house. When they were opposite it, the light from an upper window gleamed through the trees and edged a section of the barbed wire topping the fence. Seeing it, he knew it would

be impossible to help Ginny over it, even if it weren't electrified, and he wondered how he'd managed to get over it himself the first time he'd escaped. Or had he gotten out by some other means?

In a sudden astonishing flash of memory it came to him that he hadn't climbed the fence at all. He'd *wished* himself on the other side, just as he'd wished himself out of the van and back in the Rhodes' library after his capture. He'd picked a distant spot on a hill he'd glimpsed from some upper window in the house, and—early in the morning of the day he'd wound up at the Glendale station—he'd smacked Bolinsky, his guard, with the base of a table lamp and wished himself to the hill. It had been an awful day, and he'd been so afraid he wouldn't reach the Glendale station in time …

In time for what? …

The urgent tugging of Ginny's hand drew him back to the present. Then he heard it, somewhere in the distance—the distinctive chopping sound of an approaching helicopter.

They began hurrying along the fence, trying to make their way quietly through shrubbery and tangles of vines and weeds, yet knowing that the time left to them to make good their escape was rapidly running out. Just as they reached a second gate, a high steel one like the fence, they were startled by a sudden blaze of lights that disclosed a broad space of lawn behind the house. It also lit up the rear driveway and the corner of the gate where the two of them were standing.

Jan's first reaction was to give Ginny's hand a jerk and drop down beside her in the tangle of ivy at the edge of the fence. For an unpleasant moment he thought their absence had been discovered and that the lights meant the beginning of a search. Then he realized they had been turned on to guide the helicopter's landing.

He looked hopefully up at the gate and made out the short length of chain securing it to the fence. If it wasn't locked …

"It's locked," Ginny whispered, instantly picking up his thoughts. "I found the lock, and it's closed tight. Do—do you s'pose we could dig our way under the wire somewhere?"

"We'll just have to," he whispered back, and twisted around in the ivy so he could feel the lower part of the fence. The steel links went down into the ground. They would have to search for a low spot; then maybe, if he could locate something to dig with …

He raised up and quickly studied the area in front of him. Immediately ahead, and joined to the house by a covered walkway, was a long structure that blocked part of the lighted circle. It looked like an old coach house or stable that had been turned into a garage. Surely he could find a shovel or something inside …

"Stay here," he ordered, "and keep the vines over you. I'm going to get a shovel."

Before she could protest he darted forward to the nearest corner of the building and crept cautiously around the end of it away from the house. As he reached the far corner he heard the helicopter closing in somewhere behind him. He hesitated, peering around the edge, and saw that the place was indeed a garage and raced inside.

His head still hurt and it was hard to keep his thoughts straight, yet he must concentrate on finding what he needed and getting out of here before the

helicopter set down. The landing lights outside clearly showed him everything in the place—three cars and a familiar white van, and an untidy workbench in the rear. There was no sign of a shovel or any sort of garden tool.

He sped to the workbench and snatched up the first thing he saw that he might possibly dig with. It was a heavy hatchet. Whirling, he ran to the door with it, then stopped abruptly and backed away.

The helicopter was coming down directly in front of him, and someone was approaching swiftly from the house.

11

CHESS

He crouched behind the van and watched the stocky pilot swing down to the ground after the rotors stopped, and speak to someone who had come out to meet him. With a cold little ripple of shock he realized that the man from the house was Bolinsky, the muscular guard he'd attacked with a lamp base.

Just why he suddenly knew Bolinsky by sight and name was beyond him, yet little fragments of memory were crowding upon him, insisting that his mind receive them. But he had no time now. He thrust them away and tried to think, for all at once it had come to him that this was like the final part of a desperate game of chess; he and Ginny were bound to lose unless he thought of all the possible moves ahead and chose exactly the right ones.

He watched Bolinsky and Clausen, the pilot, hurry toward the house, then ran to the door—only to stop in abrupt indecision. What was he planning to do? Find a low place and dig a hole under the fence with a hatchet? How long would it take? Even now Big Doc must be climbing the stairs to administer the sedatives Helga had ordered him to give. Or he could be there this very moment, furiously trying to open one of the doors from which the keys had been taken. Unless duplicate keys were handy, the doors would be broken open—and immediately the whole staff would be sent on a frantic search of the house and grounds. Could he and Ginny tunnel under a buried fence without being discovered by the searching staff?

Jan wavered; the ringing was still in his head, and it was hard to keep his thoughts together. Then he looked at the helicopter, and it suddenly came to him that there was only one good chess move he could make at this moment. The fence could wait.

Abruptly he dashed from the garage and raced as fast as he could across the lighted area to the open door of the machine. He had no memory of ever having been in a helicopter before, and he was surprised at the size of this one, but he wasted not an instant looking around. Three quick steps took him to the pilot's seat, where he began swinging the hatchet as fast and as hard as he could. In a matter of seconds he had destroyed the compass and half the instrument panel, and everything that looked important including the radio. Before he smashed it he wondered if he should try to use it and call for help, but instantly discarded the idea because he was totally unfamiliar with the instrument, and his location was still a mystery.

He was racing back to the garage when he heard the alarm go off in the house

again. It was followed by the muffled but angry sound of a voice giving orders over the loudspeaker.

For a second he thought he'd been seen. Then it came to him that the locked doors had been opened and their escape discovered. Time had run out.

Even so, he did not hesitate when he reached the first car, which happened to be the van. Destroying the rear tires of the cars took longer than disabling the helicopter, though he managed it quickly enough when he learned the trick of slashing at the sidewalls with the hatchet's sharp point.

The final tire collapsed with a satisfying rush of air before he heard a door slam at the rear of the house. It was followed by voices and rapid footsteps on the gravel outside, but by now he was moving swiftly through the back of the garage, wondering how he could reach Ginny without being seen.

The problem was solved for him when he rounded the corner of the van, for he came face to face with her.

In a frightened whisper she said accusingly, "W-what on earth are you *doing?*"

Instead of answering he put a hurried finger to his lips, cautiously opened the van's rear door, and ordered her inside with a jerk of his head. He followed her in and very carefully pulled the door closed. When it clicked shut he wasn't sure whether it automatically locked or not, but at least they were safe for the time being.

He listened a moment, and when he could hear no one near, he said quietly, "I couldn't find anything but this hatchet to dig with, so I figured I'd better wreck the helicopter and do something to the cars. Now they're stuck here and can't take us away."

"Oh—of course!" she whispered, picking up his thoughts. "Thank goodness you pulled it off! We couldn't have dug under the fence in time without being seen—they've got lights on all around the grounds. I'm so thankful they haven't got a watchdog here, or we'd be sunk."

"Big Doc hates dogs," he told her.

"How—how do you know that?"

"It just came back to me—like some other things. I'm still wondering how you got out of your room."

"That was easy. They didn't take my glasses, and there was a piece of paper lining the drawer of my table. I stuck the paper under the door, punched the key out on it with the earpiece of my glasses, and pulled the key to me with the paper. I had a little trouble because of the carpet, but I fished the key under the door." She stopped and listened a moment, then said uneasily, "What are we going to do now?"

"Can you talk to Otis?"

"Yes. I thought sure he'd fall asleep before this, but he's still wide awake."

"Has he told you about Nat Martin?"

"Yes, and the transmitter. I told him they'd found it on you and smashed it."

"How'd you know that?"

"Big Doc came to my room and showed it to me—in the dark. He knows all about my eyes." In the vague light coming through the small opening in the partition behind her, he saw her clench her small fists and beat them on the padded floor. "That horrible man! He's been spying on us for months. He knows all about the Rhodes family. He—he said if I didn't behave and do as I was told,

that things would go badly for me and worse for you. Oh, if I'd just been able to do like Pops, and point my finger …"

"I—I know how you feel. It got me the same way when he came to my room and told me how bad it would be for you if I didn't behave. I could have …" Jan shook his head, and asked, "Does he know you can talk to Otis?"

"I don't think so. I picked a lot of crazy things out of that snaky mind of his—things I'm still trying to put together—but not that."

"Ask Otis if Nat Martin is still there."

"He's there, and so's everybody else. When I was back there by the fence I told Otis we'd managed to get out of the house, but that the fence had us stumped. So they're all waiting to see how we make out. Mr. Martin wants us to tell him anything we've learned that might give him a clue to where we are—traffic sounds, planes going over, something somebody may've said …"

"Tell Otis to ask him if he's got another transmitter. If he has, I'm going back right away and get it."

"Jan! Do—do you think you can—after all that's happened to you?"

"I've *got* to! Ask him!"

Tensely he waited while she clenched her hands and called silently to Otis again. Presently she raised her head. "Yes," she said, in a whisper so low he could hardly hear her. "They've got another transmitter. It's a bigger one, with a much longer range."

He was greatly relieved. "Okay. I'm on my way. I'll be back just as soon as I can."

It was only now, when he had stretched out on the padded floor of the van and closed his eyes, that doubt rose like an impenetrable gray wall to block him. His head still hurt, and the curious ringing in his ears hadn't stopped. He'd always been strong, but after the drug and the shock and the crack on the head when he fell, he suddenly wondered if he had enough energy left for even a one-way trip, not to speak of a return. It seemed impossible.

But he'd done it before. He'd done it twice before in his memory—though never over such a distance. Still, distance shouldn't matter, not even physical strength. Wasn't it entirely of the mind? When he was very little, his father …

His father? He clenched his hands and closed his eyes tighter, trying not to think of his father. There wasn't time for that now. He had to get to the Rhodes' library, and the only way to do that was to concentrate on it until he could see it in every detail as if he were there—and to want to be there so badly that he could actually feel the blue Chinese rug under his hands …

Gradually the library sharpened in his mind. The chairs, the piano, the long shelves of books took on the reality of three dimensions. The ringing in his head became a whirling. There was a curious sharp sound as of air being displaced, and suddenly the rough texture of the van's padding softened and became something else.

He knew he was there even before he heard the exclamations and gasps of relief from those who were waiting for him.

Unsteadily he sat up on the blue rug and opened his eyes. The room seemed to tip and spin slightly as he straightened, and he heard Nat Martin whisper hoarsely, "He actually *did* it!"

"I told you he would," said Heron Rhodes. The doctor, gray and drawn, came

over quickly and knelt beside him. “Thank God!” he breathed.

Otis and Hecuba followed. Otis, hollow-eyed, asked squeakily, “Is Ginny safe in that van?”

“I think so—at least till daylight,” Jan told him. “That transmitter, where is it? I’ve got to get back—”

“No,” Hecuba said firmly. “Not yet. What you’ve done has drained you. You’re white as a sheet. You couldn’t return now if you tried. Bill, bring him some of those cushions and prop him up so he can relax a while. And Jackson, a little coffee won’t hurt him. Bring him a cup.”

Bill Zorn made him comfortable with cushions, and the stocky lawyer brought him coffee, which he sipped gratefully. Nat Martin slipped a hand-sized transmitter into his jacket pocket and carefully buttoned it.

“Just so it’ll be there when you get ready to, er, take off,” Martin said. “Now, if you can answer a couple questions while you rest, we’ll be that much further ahead. I’ve got men ready to move as soon as we have some idea of direction. Ginny has described the building and the grounds, but it could be anywhere within a fifty-mile radius, and that covers a lot of territory. Did you happen to notice the license plate of any of the cars?”

Jan shook his head. “It was too dark in the back of the garage. Anyhow, I was moving too fast. Maybe Ginny—”

“She didn’t either. Otis has already asked her, and I’d rather not have her leave the van to look. What about traffic? Did you hear any? Or any unusual sounds?”

“I did hear traffic, but it was a long way off. Nothing else.”

“What direction was it? North of the house? South?”

“I—I don’t know. It was to the right when we faced the front porch.”

“You couldn’t see any stars?”

“No, sir. It was black dark.”

“Eh? Had it rained?”

“No, sir, but it sure sounded like it was going to. I could hear thunder off somewhere.”

Martin suddenly looked thoughtful. “We had a thunderstorm here over an hour ago, but now the stars are out. Otis, ask your sister if it’s raining there now.”

In the short interval of silence while Otis called to Ginny, the uncertainty Jan had felt about his ability to return now deepened and changed to dread. What if he couldn’t make it back? What would happen to Ginny? The answer came swiftly, unbidden, but before he could voice it, Otis burst out in a reedy voice, “Ginny says it’s rainin’ tadpoles there! an’ she can’t open the van door. She just tried it, ’cause she wanted to read the license plates, but she can’t budge it. It musta locked itself when it was closed.”

“Don’t worry about her,” Nat Martin told him. “She ought to be safe till we get there.” Abruptly he stood up and glanced at Bill Zorn. “We’d better go, Bill.”

Bill Zorn looked startled. “Go where?”

“East,” said Martin. “That’s where the weather front is moving. If it’s raining where she is, that would place her roughly thirty miles to the east and maybe a bit north, give or take a few miles. If we leave now, we’ll be that much closer when Jan gets back there with the transmitter. Time’s important.”

“They can’t get away very fast,” Bill said, rising swiftly. “Not after Jan sabotaged all their transportation.”

“Don’t kid yourself. Those people have means. The moment they discover what Jan did, they’ll send their pilot out in a cab to get another ’copter. If one isn’t available right away, they’ll hire cars and take Ginny with them. What worries me is that they must have a front they’re operating behind.”

“A front?” said Heron Rhodes, uneasily. “How do you mean?”

“Take that phone call Ginny told us about. It would seem to be a direct overseas call, but I doubt it. It’s too risky. You’d need a front that naturally would be receiving calls from abroad. Jan, did that woman start talking immediately when she answered the phone, without identifying herself?”

“Yes, sir. She didn’t say who she was. She started in talking and asking questions, real fast. In German, I think.”

“Then it was a local call, probably an extension,” Martin said. “In other words, there’s another place nearby that would often have overseas calls. A very respectable place. Does that ring any bells, Doctor?”

“A respectable place? Why, the two most respectable and exclusive sanitariums in the country are in that general direction. There’s Pine Ridge, which has no equal on earth. Then there’s Green Springs, with wealthy patients from everywhere.”

“We can forget Pine Ridge,” said Jackson Lane. “You helped found it. But Green Springs is something else. You tell him about it, Bill.”

“Well, Mr. Lane and I checked out all those institutions,” Bill Zorn said, “but this one gave us a turn. Green Springs is supposed to be run by an American corporation, but most of the stock is owned by a highly suspect German group, and they give the orders from an office in Switzerland. On top of it they have strong political connections in Washington.”

Heron whistled softly. “God preserve us!”

Even Nat Martin looked shocked. “That’s not good. In fact, it frightens me. With such a setup, Green Springs could swallow Ginny and that whole bunch, and have them out of the country before we could get permission to do a thing. We’ve got to get there before they find Ginny.”

Martin caught up his bag and jerked his head at Bill Zorn. “Let’s get going, Bill!”

Jan struggled upright and watched them hurry away. “I—I’d better get going, too,” he said. “They’ll need that transmitter signal to find the house. It may not be anywhere near the Green Springs grounds.”

“Stay where you are,” Hecuba ordered. “There’s time enough. You’re not ready to leave yet, and something tells me you shouldn’t.”

12

MATILDA

Jan, leaning back against the cushions with his eyes closed, trying to relax, had almost succeeded when the tall clock beyond the piano began to strike. He jerked upright, hands clenching nervously as he counted the deep notes. Four o'clock.

He glanced at Hecuba. "It'll soon be daylight," he said. "Hadn't I better …"

"Not yet," she told him. "I don't know why I'm making you wait, but something says you must. Anyway, Bill and Mr. Martin still have a long way to go." She looked at Otis, seemingly asleep in the big chair where he had spent most of the night, hesitated, and said quietly, "Wake up, Otis. I know you must be tired, but …"

The small boy opened his owlish eyes, now ringed with dark circles. "I—I ain't asleep," he muttered. "I'm just talkin' to Ginny to keep her comp'ny. It's awful hard bein' where she is, all 'lone. She says the rain's almost stopped, an' she can hear somebody hollering, sorta like he's mad. She thinks they've found out about the helicopter."

It suddenly occurred to Jan that his work with the hatchet would be taken as proof that he and Ginny hadn't gotten away, but were still hiding somewhere, either in the house or on the grounds. That meant the search for them would go on more furiously than ever, and that soon someone was bound to open the van door.

All at once the old doubts poured over him in a wave of torment. What if he couldn't make it back to Ginny? Why, he might never see her again. Not ever. They'd get another helicopter and take her away, and by the time Matilda got through with her …

"No!" he protested aloud. "I've got to get back!"

"What's the matter, son?" Heron asked in quick concern.

"I—I was just thinking ahead … about Matilda …"

"Matilda?" Heron raised his eyebrows. "Where does she come in?"

"She's Big Doc's machine—the one he's been putting me in to blank out my memory. Ginny didn't say anything about her?"

"No. Good lord! A machine—a devilish mind blaster! I've heard rumors of the thing. Seems that Viennese specialist whose name I can't recall—"

"Was it Leopold something-or-other?"

"Leopold … Leopold … By jingo, it *was* Leopold! Big, bald, pointed beard, soft voice—*Leopold Zworkin*. That's the rascal!"

"That's Big Doc."

"If only I'd remembered it earlier," Heron growled. "I could have had him traced and located. But it helps to know he's Zworkin. It's like being able to name a disease. Name it, and no matter how bad it is, you feel you can deal with it."

"Well, he knows all about everyone here, especially Ginny. Did she tell you? He's been having her watched for a long time. He and that woman—he called her Helga—planned to kidnap her later and take her straight to Kiev. Then I ran away …"

Heron Rhodes looked at him grimly. "Kidnap her later? Take her to Kiev? Grief and Moses, you were right, son. That rascal of a Zworkin knew all along she could see in the dark." He stood up, snapping his long fingers. His mouth began to twist in rising fury. "Why, that rotten, cripple-headed creep!" he suddenly exploded. "If I ever get my hands on him …"

"Don't touch him," Jackson Lane ground out softly, deadly serious. "Just point your finger at him, the way you used to do at those blackbirds. And I hope I'm there to see it."

"I would like to see it myself," Hecuba said vindictively. "What I cannot understand is how that Zworkin creature found out about us in the first place. We've been so careful to keep our peculiarities a secret."

"It had to be the book," Heron told her.

"But there was no clue to our identity," she said. "It was just the history of a family, and it went back hundreds of years. How—"

Heron said, "If some interested government wanted to locate the living descendants of that family, they could do it without too much trouble."

"What book is this?" Jackson Lane asked curiously.

"It's called *The Aragon Strain,*" Hecuba replied. "There's a copy of it over on the shelf behind you. It's a history of our maternal ancestors and their peculiarities. The family originated in Aragon, so the researchers used that name to protect the members of it, and to identify them as a group. There are not too many left. The last Aragon male, a direct descendant, died only a short time ago."

"Why, I never dreamed of such a thing!" the lawyer rumbled, shaking his head. "Say, do you suppose Jan has some of that Aragon blood in him?"

"It's entirely possible," Heron admitted. "If we had his last name—and Sergeant Bricker said he hoped to have some word on that in the morning—it wouldn't be hard to trace. However, you mustn't forget that abilities like Jan's can crop up in any family. In fact, they are always cropping up, but in this curious age of non-belief people are afraid to admit—"

Heron stopped abruptly as a strangled sound came from Otis. "What's the matter, son?"

"They—they've found her!" the small boy cried tearfully. "They've just opened the van door!"

"It's all right," Hecuba spoke quickly, almost with relief. "Now Jan can return with the transmitter and not be caught with it. Jan," she went on, turning to him, "is there any place in that room where you can hide the thing? You'll have to go back to the room, because they'll surely be watching for you at the van. They are bound to guess you went for another transmitter."

He nodded and said, “There’s a good place in the lavatory. I’ll put it in there the first thing.”

He thrust the cushions aside, lay flat on the rug, and closed his eyes. This time he had no doubt whatever about his ability to return. He *had* to do it, no matter what, for the only important thing in the world right now was Ginny.

The moment he closed his eyes, the bare little windowless prison of a room came sharply to his mind, and he willed himself there with all the power he could summon. And almost instantly, it seemed, the soft wool rug beneath him changed, and became a rumpled sheet upon a cot.…

Jan opened his eyes and tried to sit up, but was only barely able to do so. He fell back, surprised at his weakness and suddenly alarmed because of it. The door to the hall was open and he could hear voices somewhere below. What if someone came before he could hide the transmitter?

He fumbled with the button on his jacket pocket, drew out the transmitter, and managed to slide it under the mattress beneath him. Then slowly he thrust himself up on an elbow and swung his feet off the cot.

Strength was flowing back into him now, though he felt a little lightheaded from lack of food and sleep. He took a deep breath and stood up, went to the door and removed the skeleton key that someone had used to open it, and closed it and locked it on the inside.

The light was still on in the lavatory. Hurrying in, he found the wrecked transmitter in the other pocket of his jacket, and with the thin, broken edge of it was able to pry open the hinged plywood panel in the rear wall.

Behind the panel he had expected to find a recess of some kind, hopefully one large enough to crawl into in an emergency. Certainly there would be a place to conceal the new transmitter. But there wasn’t. The place was an open shaft full of pipes, and there was not a spot where anything the size of his hand could be safely wedged so it wouldn’t fall down through the walls.

Should he take a chance and leave the transmitter under the mattress? If it remained there only twenty minutes, that should be long enough for Nat Martin’s direction finder to track it down.

Something told him this was a poor chess move, for the mattress was the first place where a searcher would look. Anything could happen, and Nat Martin might need far more than twenty minutes to pinpoint the mansion, especially if it was out in the country, hidden on a big estate.

The smart thing would be to hide the transmitter in another room, or a closet that no one would think of looking at first.

He took it from under the mattress, went quickly to the door and tried to peer through the small circle of glass into the hall. Seeing nothing, he realized the glass was the one-way kind; a person could look in but not look out. Listening a moment, he very carefully unlocked the door and eased it open a few inches. The hall was empty, and gray daylight and a vague streak of dawn pink were showing through the window at the end of it.

The window gave him an idea. If he could raise it a little, why not slide the transmitter out on the ledge beyond it?

Swiftly he started down the hall. Before he could reach the window he heard voices below and hasty footsteps on the stairs. He raced back to his room and barely managed to close and lock the door before the footsteps reached the

landing.

He was trying desperately to think what to do when a heavy hand shook the knob. “It’s locked,” someone muttered. “Didn’t you say you left it open, George?”

“Yeah,” George growled. It sounded like the same heavy-faced George who had helped capture him days ago. “Open, and the key in the lock. The kid must be in there.”

“Then get another key and open it,” ordered the first man. Wasn’t it Bolinsky, the guard with the muscles?

“No dice,” George told him. “I used the last skeleton key in the house. We’d better bust in before that kooky kid does another vanishing act. Give it a kick.”

As a heavy blow struck the lock, Jan spun into the lavatory and closed the door. He fumbled under the knob, found a thumb latch, and shot the bolt home.

Now, until they hauled him out of here, there was only one more chess move he could make. He watched the door, and as a powerful kick knocked it back on its hinges, he lifted the panel in the back wall and held up the transmitter.

“Is this what you want?” he asked.

“Hand it over!” Bolinsky ordered in a voice that meant business, and reached for it.

Jan tossed it down the pipe shaft. “Go and get it!” he taunted.

Bolinsky cursed and grabbed him by the arm. “I’d twist your smarty head off if Big Doc wasn’t getting ready to fry it in Matilda. You’ve got ’im mad, boy. He’s really going to cook you this time.” The guard jerked his long chin at George, and snapped, “Get down in the basement and open up that door to the shaft. You’d better find that thing he dropped, and find it fast, or we could all be in the soup.”

Jan set his jaw as fear knifed through him. “W-why put me in Matilda now?” he stammered. “It’s hardly daylight! D-don’t you people ever *sleep?*”

“Big Doc works at night,” Bolinsky growled, pulling him almost furiously into the hall after the hurrying George. “Or don’t you remember? No, you wouldn’t. But I’ll tell you this: You and me, we’ve got a score to settle, and I’m not forgetting it!”

“If you’ve got any sense,” Jan flared back, “you’ll get away from here fast while you have the chance! Don’t you realize the law will be here soon?”

“Phooey! We’ll be long gone before the law ever finds *this* place. Now shut up, or I’ll give you a treatment of my own before I tuck you into Matilda.”

He did not see Matilda at once when Bolinsky hauled him into the big room with its clutter of equipment in the rear of the house. All he saw was a bedraggled Ginny sitting in a chair, her hands tied to the wooden arms, her small mouth tight and defiant. A single tear had run down from under her dark glasses and was now drying on her cheek. Near her stood Big Doc, cold little eyes almost hidden in their plump rolls of flesh, talking to a grim-faced Helga.

Ginny said words to him merely by opening her mouth and closing it. Big Doc turned from Helga and confronted him, slowly flexing his plump hands as if he wanted to strangle someone.

Then, speaking as softly as Jan had ever heard him, Big Doc said, “So you were in your room. I thought they’d find you there. And did you bring back another little tattletale?”

“He brought one,” said Bolinsky. “Before I could grab it he tossed it down the

shaft in his john. George has gone to the basement to get it."

"Pray he gets it quickly," Big Doc's voice added, ever so softly. "And if it is where he cannot get it, then pray it is not still running after falling so far." The cold little eyes bored into Jan. "You have been bad. Very bad. You have caused us great trouble. For that you must be punished. I will not tolerate—"

"Leopold!" the stern Helga interrupted. "What are you up to?"

"The boy is too smart for his own good, and much too troublesome. It is time I took some of that out of him."

"No! You are not to do anything that will hurt his ability. Besides, there isn't time—"

"I will not hurt his ability. But the rest of his mentality must be reduced. A good servant is a moron who does exactly as he is told. I intend to make a good servant out of him. As for time—"

"Leopold, if that transmitter he threw down the shaft is still working, and George cannot get to it, we haven't a minute to waste here. Harry's trying to get at least one car in shape by trying the spares from the others, but if they don't fit we'd better start walking."

"Why don't you call Jenna to send us another car?"

"At this hour? Where could she get one?"

"Her station wagon—"

"Her station wagon is here in our garage—with two flats! And I'll not ask her to call a cab. Cabs are out, even if she could find one now." She swung suddenly to Bolinsky. "When you found him, how long had the boy been back from his trip? Any idea?"

"Five minutes at the most. George had just checked his room when the doctor decided we'd better go back there and wait."

"I see. Even two minutes is two minutes too long. It would give them direction. Then all they'd have to do would be to fly over the area till they spotted a large helicopter behind an old house."

Big Doc sniffed. "Oh, nonsense, Helga. It would take hours before the authorities around here could get together and start an air search. Clausen tells me he'll have the helicopter out of here and back to the hangar in a little while."

"I thought it couldn't fly!"

"He's fixing it so it can. He hasn't any instruments, but at least he can get it back to the hangar and out of sight. Now, what I want to know is what arrangements are being made—" The big flabby man paused, eyes sharpening on the doorway. "Well, George?"

"I got it!" George announced, entering and holding out the transmitter in his broad palm. "Found it at the bottom of the shaft. And it was dead. Cracked on the concrete. I gave it another crack to make sure."

Jan's hopes drained away and a terrible coldness began to harden in his middle. He began looking covertly, desperately, around the room, searching for some object he could use as a weapon. The most difficult thing would be to break away from Bolinsky. The man had a steely grip on his arm.

Then, just to the right of Ginny, he noticed the old-fashioned fireplace. A coal grate it was, with poker, tongs and shovel in a holder on one side. The poker wasn't large, but it would do if he could get to it.

If he could think of some trick to break away from Bolinsky….

He heard George say something about going to help Harry and add over his shoulder as he went out that two cars would soon be ready to roll.

"*Two* cars?" Helga questioned, to which Bolinsky answered, "That's right. All the wheels happen to be the same size." Then the guard said to the doctor, "Are you ready for your patient, sir?"

"I'm ready," the big man replied, very softly, and added in a whisper, "Put him in Matilda!"

"Just a moment," Helga ordered. "Remember, Leopold, we haven't much time. A half hour at the most."

"Fifteen minutes is all I need, my dear. I intend to compress ten treatments into one. It will seem like many days to our rebellious young man here, but when it is over he will no longer be rebellious. He will ride like a lamb to Kiev with us instead of fighting us all the way."

The big man turned, stepped to a curtain stretched over a frame and flung it aside.

At the sight of the black coffin-like box upended at an angle in the midst of an incomprehensible puzzle of dials, tubes and gauges, Jan forgot everything but his horror of the object in front of him. His staring eyes riveted upon the padded interior, the straps whose function was to hold him powerless inside, the gleaming steel bands that would be clamped about his forehead and wrists and would carry the knifing power to attack the inner fibers of his mind and being.

Until this moment he had been able to recall little more than his terrible fear of Matilda. She did her work well. But now with the sudden sight of her he knew again the writhing blackness she could send shrieking through his brain, the inescapable icy-burning blackness that could go twisting through every mental channel forever and forever and forever …

"No!" he cried. "No! No! No!"

"Strap him in!" Big Doc commanded.

Jan heard Ginny scream out in protest. The scream seemed to release a new force inside of him, for abruptly his fear converted to fury. In spite of what he had been through, there arose in him reserves of strength he had not known he possessed. He lashed out, fighting with everything he had, kicking, biting, using fist and knee and elbow with even greater effect than when he had used them days ago in the Rhodes' hallway. Bolinsky clung to him, but panted hoarsely, "For God's sake give 'im a hypo—the kid's gone wild!"

It was Helga who came quickly with a hypodermic. He saw her approaching while Bolinsky struggled to hold him still. Suddenly remembering what he could do, he concentrated instantly on the needle. He must have been generating far more force than he realized, for it stopped Helga in her tracks—and the needle exploded.

In the second of shock that followed, Bolinsky gasped and relaxed his grip, and Jan squirmed eel-like away and leaped for the fireplace. When he whirled back to face the hated three opposing him, he had the poker in one hand and the tongs in the other.

Big Doc, showing fear for the first time, scrambled out of his way, but not fast enough to escape a vicious swing that laid open his cheek and brought a spurt of blood. Bolinsky dove for him, and succeeded only in getting himself knocked cold with the tongs.

Now Matilda was at his mercy. Jan attacked her savagely.

In seconds he had smashed every important tube and gauge, yet he continued his mad swings with the poker and tongs even after he had totally wrecked the hated thing that had destroyed so much of himself and was slated to destroy Ginny, too.

He saw Helga approaching him warily out of the corner of his eye, and he spun about in time to face her. But he knew nothing of Judo and was totally unprepared when her foot shot forth and knocked the poker from his hand. He tried to swing the tongs, but suddenly she had his free hand and he was flung to the floor with such force that the breath was knocked out of him.

A moment later she was upon him, her strong thumb pressing with instant precision against the nerve in his neck.

Everything faded and he fell into blackness.

13

ESCAPE

Jan awoke slowly in what he thought at first was a darkened room, then gradually he came to realize that the room was moving and that he was not alone in it.

"Jan!" came Ginny's whisper. "Are—are you all right?"

He started to sit up, but the room lurched and threw him to one side; he decided it was better to lie on his back, a position that made him less aware of his aches. Every part of him, including his head, seemed to ache, and the ringing was still in his ears.

"I … think … I'm … all … right," he managed finally. "I … where—where … are … we?"

"In the van."

"Oh!" He started to ask where they were going, and at the same time he wondered why it was so dark, but she picked both questions from his mind before he could voice the first one.

"We're going to Jenna's," she said. "Wherever that is. But it can't be far away. Jenna seems to be a sort of go-between. I mean, all calls come through her place, and she makes arrangements and things. And the van's dark because that toughie of a Helga fastened a piece of cardboard over the grill, so we can't see out." Ginny's whisper sank lower as she added, "I can think of only one reason why she'd do that—and I did catch her wondering about it. She's afraid I'm a telepath, and might tell somebody where we are."

"Oh." He thought about Helga a moment, and asked, "What—what did she do to me?"

"She put you out with a Judo trick. She's an expert. But she's afraid of you now. They're all afraid of you."

"Huh? Afraid of *me?* Why?"

"Because of what you can do." Ginny was silent for a moment, then said, "Jan, I never *dreamed* anyone could put up such a fight. But it wasn't anything to what you did at the last."

He sighed. "Whatever I did sure wasn't good enough. They won't fry our brains in Matilda—at least not in that one. But they've still got us."

Again she was silent for a moment, then: "Jan, don't you *realize* what you're able to do?"

"You mean about stopping the hypo?"

"Jan," she said slowly, "you not only stopped the hypo, but you blew it up and

stopped Helga."

"Huh? Well, I suppose I did bust the thing—but it was just an accident. I mean, I was so fired up and mad it would have been a wonder if the thing hadn't broken."

"It didn't just break, or even explode, really. It—it suddenly disintegrated. I mean, you destroyed it—just the way Pops destroyed that other one when those men came for you the first time. Only, you did more than Pops did. You stopped Helga. She couldn't move. I was watching. Jan, if—if you'd been looking at her instead of the hypo, and all that force had gone into her …"

"Good grief!"

He was shocked. It was a profound shock that held him silent for long seconds while the van made uneasy progress along a bumpy and very winding road. "Why?" he asked miserably. "Why did I have to be born with something like *that* to worry about?"

"That's no way to look at it," she said quickly. "My goodness, if Pops learned to live with it, so can you. Just be thankful you have it! Especially now. Don't you see? If you use it right, it ought to help us get away from these awful people!"

"Oh." He hadn't thought of it that way, though at the moment it didn't seem possible that he could ever find the strength to call upon that power again. He was so tired. He was hungry, too, but mainly he was used up. He was so used up he knew he had only to close his eyes and he would fall instantly to sleep here in the jolting van. Then it occurred to him that everyone else, from Big Doc to Ginny, must feel much the same way.

"Yes," said Ginny, answering his thoughts. "They do. Only I'm so on edge I couldn't sleep now if I tried—though I know I must if I have the chance. But Big Doc's ready to collapse, and so is Helga. You've wrecked all their plans. They've got to get us out of the country fast, but there's no way they can do it till tonight. I don't know how they plan to do it—that seems to be mostly Jenna's problem. In the meantime all they can do is hide us—and hole up somewhere themselves."

"How about Otis? Are you still able to get through to him?"

"Not since you got back. He must have fallen asleep. After all, he's been up all night too, and he—he's only five."

Her small hand found his in the dark, and clung to it. "Jan, I—I can't help being scared, but it's not half as bad as it would be if I were alone. As long as you're with me, I—I sort of feel we've got a chance—in spite of what happened to the transmitters. I mean, we're really a pair of dillies, and with what the two of us can do …"

"It's a stalemate now, but we'll beat 'em yet," he said, trying to put more confidence into his words than he felt. Then he added, "If they're afraid of me, I wonder why they didn't tie me up or something?"

"I'm sure it's because they don't quite realize how dangerous you can be. It just hasn't hit them yet. I'm sure it will later when they're rested and have had more time to think about it. But right now it gives us an edge. Jan—"

"Yes?"

"I've got an idea. When they stop and take us out—and I think they're turning in at Jenna's now—act real beat. I mean, you were unconscious when they put us in here, so be real dazed when they haul us out."

"I get you. Hey—what's that under my foot? I keep feeling something …"

"It's the hatchet," she whispered. "I put it in the corner when you left, and they didn't notice it when they found me."

"Give it to me."

He reached forth in the dark and she placed the handle of it in his hand. "What—what are you going to do with it?"

"I don't know yet."

The van was slowing. Quickly he slid the hatchet's handle down in his jeans, leaving the blade to protrude above his belt buckle. After giving his shirt a twitch to partially cover the blade, he buttoned his jacket over it. It was going to be pretty awkward, but he figured if he kept his hand on his stomach and walked with a stoop, he might get by with it.

Just what he was going to do with the hatchet he hadn't the slightest idea, though as the van stopped it suddenly occurred to him that it might be a good tool for prying open a locked door. Anyway, it was a weapon, and somehow he had vastly more confidence in it than in a curious and highly unpleasant possession that Heron Rhodes probably would call the evil eye, which couldn't chop through or pry open anything.

He heard the front doors of the van being opened and slammed closed as people got out. Other doors opened and closed. There were footsteps and a mutter of voices coming closer—quick, questioning and even angry voices. No one here seemed very happy about what was going on.

A woman said, "Leopold! What happened to you?"

He recognized Big Doc's soft muttered growl, then Helga snapped, "That boy tried to kill him with a poker. He's a devil! Now those rooms—"

"There's just one room, Helga. I told you. But it's safe. We covered the window."

"Very well. Put them together. It's only until tonight—that is, if you can get that rig."

"We've got it, but it will be after nine before it's serviced and ready. Here, take one of the sacks—you'd better handle the boy. George, open the door."

The rear door of the van was unlocked and cautiously opened. Jan lowered his head as a light flashed in his face. Someone caught his legs and he was hauled out into the dimness of a closed garage. He caught a brief glimpse of Big Doc with a bandage on the side of his face, then abruptly Helga pulled a cloth sack down over his head. Almost in the same motion she caught his right hand, gave it a quick twist behind his back, and propelled him forward.

He groaned and stumbled, clutching his stomach.

"What's the matter with you?" she demanded.

"I—I hurt."

"You'll hurt a great deal more if you attempt any tricks. Straight ahead, easy … up a step … up another … turn as I guide you …"

The sack over his head seemed a silly precaution, unless they'd become afraid of his curious power. Yet by the time he had made several turns he had lost all sense of direction, and he was beginning to wonder if she didn't suspect them both of being telepathic. If Big Doc and company had been truly smart, he thought, they'd have knocked us both out with hypos while I was unconscious. That way we wouldn't have any idea of where we were or how far we'd come.

Then he thought, no, they are saving the hypos till later, so we won't be able to tell anyone what kind of rig they are using to take us away. Rig? Did that mean another helicopter, or something else?

In spite of Helga's urging, he forced himself to move slowly and occasionally stumble as if in weakness. He was almost afraid to even think of the hatchet, though he was careful to keep his hand over the blade, pressing it against him so the weight of it might not be too much for his belt. He was vastly relieved when he and Ginny were thrust through a doorway, and he heard someone close and lock the door behind them.

On the other side of the door a woman said in a disgruntled voice, "There's food for you on the table. Make it last, for that's all you'll get while you are here."

Jan pulled the sack from his head and glanced at Ginny, who had done the same. She wrinkled her nose at the door, then tossed the sack aside with a wry little smile. It gave him the feeling that the sack had had no more effect upon her vision than darkness.

The room, he saw at a quick glance, was hardly larger than his earlier prison. There was a cot on one side, a chair and a card table against one wall, and a sleeping bag on the floor on the other side. A door on the left opened into a tiny lavatory containing a washbowl and a toilet. On the card table were a plate of sandwiches, two glasses and a small pitcher of what seemed to be orange juice. Above it, covering what was obviously a window, was nailed a three-foot square of plywood. A small fixture in the high ceiling gave the place an unpleasantly weak illumination, which somehow reminded him of a storage area in an old hotel. Near it, air hissed downward from a circular vent.

Jan looked thoughtfully at the plywood over the window, then glanced at the door. Seeing no peephole, he listened until the footsteps in the halls faded away, and quickly drew the hatchet from his belt and slipped it under the sleeping bag. Ginny had gone to the card table and was testing a sandwich while she filled the glasses from the pitcher.

"They're all cheese," she announced unhappily. "But I intend to eat two of them anyway. They'll help me go to sleep—and I've *got* to sleep. Anyway, I'm so hungry I could eat snails."

"Snails are good," he said absently, frowning again at the plywood over the window, then reaching eagerly for one of the sandwiches. "My father loved them."

She sipped some of the orange juice, and asked quietly, "Jan, what was your father's name?"

"Raoul," he said, and began cramming the sandwich into his mouth. He gulped it down, reached for another and mumbled, "You take the cot." He managed the second sandwich, drank some orange juice, and slumped on the sleeping bag. There was something he wanted to tell her, but it slipped from him as he closed his eyes.…

He was drawn forcibly out of a frightening dream by Ginny shaking him awake. Since the dream, as nearly always of late, had to do with blackness and Big Doc, it was no great relief to be suddenly faced with the unpleasant fact that he and Ginny were still Big Doc's prisoners.

"Sure wish we had a watch," he muttered, sitting up and rubbing the sleep

from his eyes. “If I just knew the time …”

“It’s a little after four in the afternoon,” she told him. “We’ve slept about ten hours. How do you feel?”

“A lot better than I did. How—how do you know the time?”

“Otis is back in business.” Her small face was pinched and she was as serious as he’d ever seen her. “Go wash your face and freshen up. We’ve some things to talk over.”

He hurried into the washroom; coming out, he poured the rest of the orange juice into their glasses and sat down facing her on the sleeping bag. She took her glass, but set it down without touching the juice. She looked as if she were ready to cry, but she didn’t.

She chewed on her lip a moment and rubbed a freckle on her cheek that she always rubbed when thinking hard. “Jan,” she began suddenly, “we’d better forget about Bill and Mr. Martin. There’s no way they can help us. Otis told me Bill picked up the transmitter signal on the direction finder, but lost it before he could get it to working properly. It didn’t point anywhere near the Green Springs area, as they thought it would. So that’s out. Pops got them a small plane right away, and they tried for hours to locate that old house where we were, but without a big helicopter in the back yard they couldn’t—”

“Clausen managed to take it away?”

“Yes. It left when we started over here in the van. Anyway, they can’t even guess where we are now. Of course, Pops and Aunt Heck are cruising around all the back roads with Otis, hoping he can sort of get in range of us, but …”

“Otis found me,” he reminded her.

“But that was easy, Jan. He had only a few miles to search in. This is different. It’s easy to figure out, though I’m no good at math. If we’re only ten or twelve miles from them, double the radius and that gives one side of a square. That works out to four hundred square miles. How long do you think it would take poor little Otis to … to …?” Her voice broke.

“Hey, wait a minute!” he said quickly, sliding over and putting his arm around her. Somehow he knew he’d never thought of putting his arm around any girl before, but this was different. Ginny was like a sister, only more so. They were like a team, and she’d become the most important person in the world to him.

“Now look,” he hastened, “I’m not depending on Otis or Nat Martin or anyone to get us out of this. We’re going to do it ourselves. If anyone tries to stop us, they’ll get a taste of this.” He reached under the sleeping bag and drew out the hatchet. “It ought to open the door for us. If it won’t, maybe it’ll pry off that plywood so we can get out of the window.”

Impulsively she kissed him on the cheek, then smiled. “I’m awfully glad we met on the train that day.”

“Me too!” he said earnestly, and hugged her. “Now look, we’ve got to figure out a couple things, First, did you get any idea of what part of the house we’re in?”

She nodded. “That sack didn’t stop me. It just made things a little fuzzy. It’s a big, long house, but not nearly as old as the other, and I think we’re in a wing on the side of a hill. Or maybe it’s just a steep slope—all I got was a glimpse through a porch at the end of a hall. Anyway, I hope you can open the door, ’cause I’ve a feeling it’s an awful drop from that window to the ground.”

"Have you heard anyone moving around in the house? Or out in the hall?"

"Yes. There's a room close to us—maybe it's across the hall—where I've heard people go in and out several times since I've been awake. One of them—I think it was a man—went out a little while ago and drove off. But that leaves two people in the room. Oh dear, they must be the ones left to guard us!"

"Sure, they wouldn't leave us unguarded now."

Frowning, no longer as confident as he had been, he got up, went to the door and put his ear to it. As he did so, a telephone rang and he heard a woman answer it. When she hung up a man said something in a low voice, but he was unable to make out any of the conversation.

Remembering the turns, he guessed the man and the woman were across the hall in a corner room where they could watch the door here. He stepped back from the door and studied the way it fitted into the frame, then very carefully tried the knob to find out how loose it was. Finally he tried wedging the hatchet blade between door and frame and pressing it sideways. It was immediately obvious that he would be unable to budge the door without making so much noise that it would be heard all over the house.

Lips compressed, he turned away from it and went to the window.

His spirits rose a little when he discovered a lower corner where the square of plywood, slightly warped, did not fit tightly against the wood beneath it. The hatchet blade went under it easily. A slow, careful twist of the handle widened the space. He pushed the blade higher and again twisted the handle. A nail squeaked—it sounded so loud he was sure it must have been heard across the hall, and in his sudden nervousness he almost dropped the hatchet. He stopped and went to the door and listened. Hearing nothing alarming, he hurried back and was gratified to see that the corner of the plywood had been lifted a full inch from the window.

After that he proceeded slowly, using the hatchet with greater care. When the lower edge of the square had been loosened, he was surprised at the ease with which the sides came free. He had to stand on the chair to get the upper corners, and now he discovered that the top of the plywood had not been nailed.

His small delight was almost immediately cut short by the sudden arrival of a car somewhere outside, and he heard quick footsteps entering the house. Ginny whispered in alarm, "I think that's Helga. She must be coming here!"

Jan barely had time to return the chair to its place near the table, and slide the hatchet under the sleeping bag, when the key turned in the lock. He glanced in despair at the window, for the piece of plywood, now loose on all sides, needed only a strong jerk to remove it. A telltale line of daylight showed all around it, but it was too late to do anything about it now.

He managed to slump to the sleeping bag as the door came partially open, showing Helga's gray hair and stern features.

"I brought some hamburgers and milkshakes," she announced crisply, thrusting an open cardboard box over on the table. "Better eat them now, for we will be leaving soon and there will be no stops for food until tomorrow."

Without raising her eyes to the window, she withdrew and closed and locked the door.

As the aroma of the freshly grilled hamburgers reached his nostrils, Jan rose eagerly and started for the table.

"No!" Ginny whispered urgently. "No! *Don't touch anything in that box!*"

"Huh?" He gaped at her. "What's wrong with it?"

"It—it's all been doped! Her mind was full of it. It's easier than trying to give us hypos, and she wants to load us in a big moving van while we don't know what's going on, so I can't tell Otis. Jan, we'd better get out of here as fast as we can!"

Before his final bout with the plywood, he hurriedly braced the chair under the doorknob to delay any sudden visitors. The plywood took longer to pull off than he had counted on, but he accomplished it finally without too much noise. Then he stared out in dismay at the totally unexpected view.

He'd hoped to see other houses somewhere near, or a road or some sign of people, but there was nothing but woods—thick, dark woods. They started directly behind the house and dropped sharply away into an impenetrable gloom of rain. Rain! He hadn't even dreamed of such a thing.

Quickly he raised the window, tugged the screen loose, and held it while he peered cautiously out. What seemed to be a part of the garage was off to his right. Projecting on the left was a corner of a porch. No one was in sight. He scowled unhappily at the distance to the ground, then dropped the screen and turned to Ginny, intending to tell her to bring the spread that covered the cot. She had already brought it and was busy tying a knot in one corner.

"If you can hang on, I'll let you down," he whispered.

She nodded and scrambled to the window sill. Grasping the knot in the spread, she swung over the edge. He clung to the heavy cloth, easing it across the sill until she touched the ground.

Instead of retrieving the spread, he dropped it, carefully dropped the hatchet on top of it when Ginny was out of the way, then snatched a sheet from the cot and dragged the card table to the window. After tying a corner of the sheet to one of the legs, he swung over the sill, braced the table in the window and slid downward. Halfway to the ground his speed abruptly increased as the flimsy table leg came loose, and he landed in a heap on the pile of cloth, narrowly missing the hatchet. Even so, most of his weight came down on his right foot, and pain knifed through it as it turned under him.

14

ELYSIUM

For a moment, as he tried to rise, it seemed he would never make it, and that in an incredible second of bad luck they had lost their chance at freedom. At the same instant he heard a sudden shout from the house—it seemed to come from the porch—and realized they had been discovered already.

"Run!" he told Ginny. "Get down in the woods! Hurry!"

Instead she caught his hand and jerked him to his feet. "Come on!" she gasped. "You can do it!"

He had to do it, if only for her sake. On this rocky, uneven ground, full of obstacles that her curious sight might be unable to detect, he realized she would be speedily overtaken unless he led the way and somehow found a hiding place.

All in one motion he swept up the wadded cot cover and flung it over his shoulders. Then he seized the hatchet with one hand and her arm with the other and started for the trees. With every step, blinding pain shot through his ankle. Somehow he put the pain aside by concentrating on the chess moves ahead.

He'd intended the spread from the cot to give them some protection against the rain, but now the color of it suggested a better use. It had a green-and-brown floral pattern that ought to blend well with the low foliage around them. Why not use it as camouflage?

If he could just find the right place to hide …

He could hear voices somewhere behind them, but when he glanced back he could see no one because of the dense growth of trees and the patches of shrubbery. Pausing a moment behind the thick trunk of an oak, he peered hurriedly about, then drew Ginny toward a low patch of shrubs on their right. It looked like a tangle of young cedars.

"Get down and crawl in under them," he ordered.

She slipped quickly out of sight. He followed her, and carefully drew the green-and-brown spread in around them so that it covered them both.

He heard Helga's voice directing the search. The woods, all at once, seemed full of people, running, calling to each other, crashing through the underbrush. Helga's voice came nearer. He made out her hurrying footsteps as she approached the thicket. She stopped. Someone else, running slower, paused beside her, breathing heavily.

"Can you see them?" she asked.

"Not in this rain." It was Big Doc's voice, gasping for air.

"She fooled us all," Helga spat. "The little blonde witch! She's not only

telepathic—she's a mind reader!"

"It is not the girl we must worry about," the other panted. "She is not dangerous. The boy is."

"You should have known that in the beginning," Helga snapped.

"How could I? He didn't know it himself."

"You read the book, Leopold. You knew the blood he has in him. You should have taken into account his potential."

"I can say the same for you. You should have taken into account the girl's potential."

"Oh, stop arguing with me! We've got to catch them."

"We'll catch them, my dear. They cannot possibly get away. Everyone's been alerted. The rain makes it difficult, but if we miss them before dark, we'll get them in the morning."

"We'd better! If they learn where they are—"

"They'll learn nothing in the dark. We'll close in on them at daylight, and there's no way they can escape us. You know that."

"If you are wrong, Kiev will have our heads. How do you intend to handle the boy?"

"Gently, my dear. Gently. They've all been cautioned to take the girl first. He'll do as he is told then, but if he is stubborn, we'll use gas. I would not care to face anyone of the Aragon strain when—"

"Stop talking and let's get after them! Take that path, Leopold. I'll go to the right …"

Jan had forgotten his foot. He did not remember it until all sounds of the searchers died away and he tried to move. He decided it was better to lie still.

"How do you feel?" Ginny asked worriedly.

"Good enough. I'll be able to hobble when the time comes. But I think we'd better stay right here till dark. I just hope the rain isn't too much for you."

"Oh, I'm all right. Pops says it doesn't hurt you to stay soaking wet for a long time as long as you don't get cold. I'm not cold yet. I'm just wet … and sort of hungry. I could even enjoy one of those awful cheese sandwiches."

"So could I. But we'd better stop thinking about food till tomorrow. Right now I'm wondering which way to go when we leave here."

"I'll show you. There's a path ahead, and it leads to some sort of shelter. I picked it out of Helga's mind. Only there was something very important I couldn't quite get …"

"How do you mean?"

"About catching us in the morning. They seemed to think it would be easy."

"It would be easy if we were fenced in, like at the other place."

"Well, I sort of got the feeling that we were enclosed."

"Then we must be."

"Oh, dear! Then we've got to find the fence, and somehow get to the other side of it—before daylight."

"Right. We'll dig under it. Don't forget I've got the hatchet. And there don't seem to be any outside lights around, so we'll have plenty of time to dig." He puzzled over their predicament, and added, "I—I just wish we knew what sort of place this is. Somehow it doesn't make sense. I mean, why would there be lights and a high fence close around the big house where we were, but none here? The

two places are certainly connected."

"Maybe," said Ginny, "it's all part of a big estate. There are some whoppers around, even bigger than Pops'. And that big old house where we were, that's probably what they called the Center. That would sort of explain the lights and the high fence and the charged wire on top …"

They speculated about it while the gloom deepened into twilight. Once Jan said, "How did Big Doc learn about my being of the Aragon strain? They told me about the book when I was back at the library."

"That's easy. He knew who your folks were."

"But my folks are dead."

"Are you sure, Jan?"

"Of course I'm sure! I—I—"

"What is it?"

"I almost had it. It slipped out of my mind."

"It's strange, but a lot of little things are coming back to you. I think touching that live wire did it. It must have opened some channels that Matilda closed. Is it dark yet?"

"Just about."

"Then it ought to be safe for us to start looking for that fence. But first I ought to have a stick. I'll find a limb or something, and you cut it for me. Then we'd better tear this cot cover in half. It's awfully tough, but if you'll start the edge with the hatchet, maybe we can tear it."

"What's the idea?"

"It'll give each of us a half to wear. I know it's soaking wet, but we're wet too, and it'll help to hold in our body heat so we won't get chilled. Then, if we keep on the move …"

The drizzling rain was still falling when they started in search of the fence, and the darkness was absolute. He might have been the blind one as he clung to her hand and hobbled along a half step behind her, the hatchet in his belt while he leaned on a stick he had been forced to cut for himself. His foot had swelled and now every step was torture.

"Pain," he suddenly remembered his father saying that last time, "is a devilish annoyance you can sidestep. The trick is to think of something else, something so interesting that it takes up all your mind. Then pain vanishes …"

Pain didn't vanish by any means, but the thinking helped, and he certainly had plenty to think about. He was so occupied with his curious chain of thought that he hardly noticed it when they began walking on a gravel path. It was only when Ginny stopped, and they went up a short flight of steps into a place away from the rain, that he came out of his mental canyon.

"Where are we?"

"Why—why, it's the craziest place!" she exclaimed. "It's a sort of tea house. An Oriental one, I mean, with cute little red-and-black tables and chairs, and Japanese lanterns and things.… What's a tea house doing out here in the middle of these thick woods?"

"I don't know, and I don't like it. Let's get out of here!"

"But Jan, there's a kitchen over there behind a screen, and I can see a refrigerator. I'll bet it's got something in it we could eat. Jan, I'm *starving!*"

"Then keep on starving! Let's get away from here. This place could be a trap. If

they came and found us now when neither of us can move very fast …"

"Maybe you're right," she said meekly. "They've been here already, 'cause I can make out their wet footprints on the floor. That Helga may get a notion to sneak back."

She tugged him around and out through the entrance and back into the rain. After a few minutes she left the gravel path they were on and drew him into the woods.

"Where are you going?" he asked, stumbling along blindly behind her on the uneven ground.

"To the fence," she said. "I'm just following my nose, but if we are surrounded by a fence we can't miss it. Anyhow, I thought we ought to get off the path. Look behind you."

Far behind, vague in the rain and almost hidden by the trees, he could make out dim lights in the area of the tea house. Helga and company had returned.

Gracias a Dios!" he murmured.

"What did you say?"

"Thanks to God—that was the way my mother always put it when she was thankful."

"I knew your mother was Spanish. What was her name?"

"Teresa."

"And your father's was Raoul. What was his last name?"

"Riggs. No—it couldn't be. Riggs is dead."

"How do you know that?"

"I—I—I can't remember."

"But I'm sure you will.… think I see the fence ahead."

How she could distinguish anything in this utter blackness was beyond him. Even when the steel mesh of the fence was inches from his nose he would not have known it was there save by touching it.

The lower edge, he was relieved to find, was not buried more than an inch or two. But when he tried to dig under it, he found the ground stony and hard, the dense clay scarcely softened by the rain. They wasted some time searching for an easier place to dig, and finally came back to where they had started. Only the fear of an electrified wire prevented Jan from trying to go over the top. He had all but forgotten his foot.

Their progress with the hatchet was heartbreakingly slow. Jan began to worry if they would get through by daylight. Once, while resting his tired hands, he asked, "Did you tell Otis about the tea house?"

"Tried to," Ginny panted, taking a turn with the hatchet. "But I was too late. He'd folded up again. I was hoping Pops would know about it. I'm sure we're on somebody's estate, and Pops has been on most of the big places in this part of the country …"

The hole deepened and began to accumulate water in the bottom. The worst part was digging out the other side, for it meant getting down on one's knees in the muddy hole, chopping upward with the hatchet, and finally raking out the debris in the form of mud with their hands.

Time passed and they worked silently, mechanically, but a little more desperately, shivering now with cold and fatigue. The rain finally stopped, though Jan was not aware of it in his battle with the mud. A subtle change came

over the blackness. With a sudden shock he realized he could see. Daylight—and possible discovery—was almost upon them.

"I think we can squeeze under it," he said. "I'll go first, and then pull you through."

It took some squirming, but somehow they made it, taking most of the mud with them to the other side. Here they dropped their cot-cover capes, heavy with mud, and set off as fast as they could through a surprisingly park-like woods. Jan's first concern was to get as far away as possible from the danger area of the fence. And somewhere ahead, surely there would be houses, people to help them, a telephone.

Ginny noticed the picket fence before he did. Too weary for speech, she pointed to it. Then he made out the neat cottage behind it, and in the distance the winding lane with more cottages half-hidden by well-tended shrubbery. At the moment it seemed almost too good to be true.

Ignoring his throbbing foot, he dropped his stick, caught Ginny's hand and began hobbling toward the first cottage as if it were a changeable mirage that might suddenly vanish unless he got to it in time. It was not yet sunrise.

Just as they reached the fence, two tall, elderly and impeccably dressed gentlemen in cutaway coats and striped trousers came down the cottage steps, canes under their arms, and headed for the gate. White-haired, with long horsey faces, they might have been diplomats on their way to an embassy meeting. At the gate they paused to pull on gloves, but instantly froze and white eyebrows climbed at the sight of their visitors, soaked through and spattered with mud from head to toe.

"I say, Roderick old boy," drawled one, in a voice that was definitely English, "d'you see what I see?"

"I am not at all sure what you see, brother Reginald," drawled the other. "I never am. What do you *think* you see?"

"It is quite beyond me. Quite." White eyebrows climbed higher and eyes sharp and curious as a lizard's fastened on Jan. "I say, m'lad. Where are you from, and what do you want?"

Jan had been struggling for speech since he reached the fence, not sure whether he was in his right mind or merely seeing double. After their ordeal in the rain, everything had taken on a nightmarish quality.

Then he realized he was looking at twins. "I—we—we've just dug our way under the fence," he gasped. "We—"

"If you're from the other side of the fence," interrupted the second twin, "you must return immediately. You are not allowed here. It is strictly forbidden."

"Strictly," affirmed the first twin, frowning at an old-fashioned gold watch on the end of a chain. "We'd better be taking our constitutional, Roderick. We have only twenty minutes."

Jan swallowed. "But—but you don't understand! We've got to get to a telephone! We—"

"No, m'lad. Not in Elysium. The telephone has been outlawed as an abomination. Only the duchess—"

"Rank has its privileges," murmured the other twin. "But hers is strictly for official calls. Now Roderick—"

"Did—did you say Elysium?" Ginny stammered, her hand tightening in Jan's.

"I did. And I must impress upon you that it is a strictly restricted community."

"Strictly restricted," affirmed the other twin. "Now, if you will pardon us, we have very little time—"

"Please, won't you help us?" Jan burst out, exasperated. "Can't you see we need help? We were kidnapped! We escaped and we've been in the rain all night, digging under the fence! Please, won't you at least help Ginny? Can't you see how wet and cold she is?"

The two gentlemen looked at each other, bewildered. "Kidnapped?" said one. "All night in the rain? Did you hear that, Roderick?"

"I heard it, Reginald. They escaped. That does form a bond. We are all escapees from an impossible world. We'd better get Jeeter. He'll know what to do."

"Jeeter isn't here, Roderick. Don't you remember? You sent him over to the club with that beastly dish of bloaters. You *would* eat bloaters for breakfast!"

In their bewilderment their hands fluttered helplessly. It suddenly came to Jan that this elegant but elderly pair, notwithstanding their lizard-bright eyes, were not entirely competent, and that the arrival of Ginny and himself had thrown them completely off their accustomed orbit. Then he heard Ginny, shivering at his side, give a frightened gasp.

"Oh lordy!" she whispered. "There's the white van!"

A quick turn of his head and he glimpsed the white van, far down by the last cottage, just turning into the lane. His hand tightened on Ginny's and on the instant he thrust open the gate and drew her into the yard beside the bewildered twins. He did not even question whether or not it was the same white van that had come to haunt him; he knew by the coldness knotting within him that it was, and that Helga was probably at the wheel.

"If you can't help us," he cried, "at least you can hide us in the house somewhere! Those people in that van—they're after us!"

Without waiting to see what the reaction of the Englishmen would be, he ran for the steps, pulling Ginny with him. As he burst into the cottage he prayed that the shrubbery crowding the yard had hidden them from anyone down the lane.

Inside with Ginny, he started to close the door, but the twins were already hurrying up the steps. "I say," said one, entering. "We do want to help, really. Beastly thing being kidnapped, and having to dig in the rain all night."

"Utterly beastly," echoed his brother. "So we'll do what we can, time permitting. We'll give up our constitutional to help, but breakfast at the club with the duchess is another matter. We must be there on the dot."

"On the dot," said his twin, glancing at his watch. "It takes but two minutes to walk to the club. That leaves us sixteen minutes—"

"Fifteen minutes, Roddy old boy," corrected the other, glancing at an identical watch. "You always were a bit slow. That's why I inherited the title, being born three minutes ahead of you. Er, ah, permit me to introduce myself," he added, turning. "I am Sir Reginald Weems, Bart. And this is my brother, Sir Roderick Weems, a mere knight. Er, by the way, how *did* you earn your knighthood, Roddy? It slips my mind."

"It slips mine too, at the moment," said Sir Roderick. "But it was something utterly dashing I did. I was always nipping about, doing utterly dashing things in those days. But time is passing. If we would help our young visitors—by the way,

you have names?"

"I—I'm Jan, sir—and she's Ginny Rhodes."

"Only fourteen minutes now," Sir Reginald reminded them, still holding his watch. "What can we do for you in fourteen minutes, my friends?"

Jan rubbed his eyes and looked from one brother to the other. He had the curious feeling that reality had departed and that he and Ginny were trapped in some netherworld from which there was no hope of escape.

"I—I—before you go," he stammered, "could you give us something to eat? We —we're pretty beat, and we haven't had a bite since yesterday morning."

Again that look of helplessness came over the long horsey faces of the Weems brothers. "Dear me," said Sir Roderick. "If only Jeeter were here …"

"Jeeter isn't here," Sir Reginald reminded him. "What are we to do?"

There was a moment of pained silence. Then a great light seemed to dawn in Sir Reginald's eyes. His long face lit up, and he smiled.

"I say, Roddy, I have a ripping idea! Perfectly ripping! Why don't we take our friends to breakfast with us? D'you suppose her grace would mind? Really, I think she'll be amused."

Sir Roderick looked scandalized. "But *look* at them! They are hardly *presentable!*"

"Oh, dash it all, a bit of water and some of Jeeter's uniforms should do the trick."

"Of course! He is quite small, and those old navy things ought to be just right. I'll get them and you show them the baths."

"Righto! But we'll have to hurry," said Sir Reginald, who was still holding his watch. "No time for showers and primping. Just wipe off the worst, and into your togs."

Jan's feeling of unreality grew as he stripped off his sodden jeans in one of the bathrooms and splashed water on his face. None of this made sense, least of all the impeccable Weems brothers. What strange sort of place was Elysium, where a duchess invited friends to a formal breakfast this early in the morning?

His fresh clothing, a middy blouse and a pair of bell-bottomed trousers of a generation ago, fitted him well enough. He had just finished dressing when there came a tap on the door, and Sir Reginald said, "Time's up, m'lad. Punctuality is the mark of breeding, so we must be on our way."

Jan hurried into the living room, overcrowded with old furniture and glass cases of butterflies. Ginny, in too-long trousers rolled to her ankles, was already there. As he entered, she put her finger to her lips and pointed to a window.

He peered through the curtains, and his heart contracted.

The white van and Jenna's station wagon, filled with Big Doc's white-coated helpers, were coming to a stop in the lane.

15

BREAKFAST

Big Doc and Helga got out of the van, opened the gate and started grimly up the walk. Bolinsky, Harry and George poured from the station wagon, came swiftly through the gate and fanned across the yard as if heading for the rear of the cottage. Inside, Jan retreated to the turn of the hall with Ginny and stood waiting uneasily for the doorbell to ring.

When it did, Sir Reginald answered it.

"Yes?" he said coldly, as he opened the door.

"We are searching," came the equally cold tones of Helga, "for two young escapees from the other side of the fence. We have reason to believe they came here."

"Here? Escapees? You must be out of your mind, woman. Just who are you?"

"I am in charge of the new therapy center over there. I must warn you, these escapees are extremely dangerous—"

"That, my good woman, is your worry, not ours. Now get along with you! You know the agreement: No motored vehicles over here, no wearers of white coats, no intrusions. This is Elysium, and we'll not be intruded upon." Sir Reginald paused, then exclaimed, "By my word, if you had escapees, you should have gone to our constabulary about them. Why didn't you? Eh? Answer me that! There is something deucedly wrong here. By Jove, I think I'll call the constabulary myself!"

Sir Reginald slammed the door, but instead of leaving he stood behind it waiting, eyes twinkling. He had not long to wait. There were hurried voices outside, the sound of footsteps, then motors taking off. The old man chuckled, but his mirth died as he looked at his watch.

"My word, we are late! Come, come! Out the back way, fast!"

Jan took Ginny's hand and followed the brothers into a flower garden at the rear of the house, then down a narrow path that led past other flower gardens in the rear of other neat cottages. The morning sun was still only a thin gleam through the trees when they reached another lane. Before crossing it, the brothers crouched behind a shrub like overgrown boys playing cops and robbers, and peered with exaggerated caution to right and left.

"I see the blighters!" Sir Roderick suddenly exclaimed in a hoarse whisper. Jan knew it was the younger brother who spoke, only because, a minute before, he had made the rather startling discovery that Sir Roderick wore tennis shoes, in contrast to the other's entirely proper attire.

"Where are they?" growled Sir. Reginald.

"Down below the club, making a turn. We'd better wait till they are out of sight. No use taking chances."

"Righto! They are rascals, no doubt of it. They know the rules, and they left in a flash when I mentioned the constabulary."

"You—you really have a police force here?" Jan asked hopefully.

"Oh, no, no. We want nothing to do with the police. Heaven forbid! Our constabulary is quite private, made up of our own men. Our valets and helpers and what-not. Jeeter is a member. When there is a spot of trouble, one merely presses a button, and they come on the run." Sir Reginald chuckled. "What those blighters didn't know is that the entire staff of the constabulary is at the club, waiting to serve us. Ha!"

"But it isn't funny, old boy," said the brother in tennis shoes. "There's deviltry afoot! Our young friends are still in danger! That blighted female who professes to be from the therapy center—"

"A harpy if there ever was one. I could feel the evil in her. D'you know her name, m'lad?"

"They call her Helga," Jan said. "And that big man with her, that's Dr. Leopold Zworkin. They're the ones who had us kidnapped."

The brothers stared at him. "Zworkin, did you say? *Zworkin?*"

He nodded. The brothers looked at each other as if they'd just heard that the Evil One had invaded Paradise. They seemed to have forgotten that they were late for breakfast.

"The beastly rotter!" exclaimed Sir Roderick. "It was Zworkin who did for poor Bertie!"

"Burned out his brain!" Sir Reginald muttered sadly. "Used to be the life of the party. Who cared if he was a bit too active at times? But that bloody Zworkin had to go to the policy board and say that Bertie could be helped by a session with Matilda. Poor Bertie!"

"M-Matilda?" Jan stammered. "You—you know about that thing?"

"Indeed we know! But what can we do?" For a moment of bewilderment Sir Reginald's hands fluttered helplessly, then a sudden look of resolve came over his long horsey face. "By Jove!" he burst out. "The blighter's on the wrong side of the fence! We'll fix him! I'll tell the duchess!"

Just what good it would do to tell the duchess was beyond Jan's imagining at the moment, but as the brothers leaped to their feet and started across the lane as fast as their aging limbs could carry them, he caught Ginny's hand again and followed. If his foot still pained him, he was too tired and hungry to know it, and he was lost in a feeling of complete unreality. Hopefully the sprawling stone structure in the trees ahead would offer, at the very least, temporary safety as well as food.

Bicycles—and tricycles—were parked all about the entrance, which was guarded by a pair of aloof stone lions. Just inside, the panting twins paused to regain their composure. Sir Reginald said quickly, "You must be on your toes with her grace. Not only is she quite impossibly rich, but she—"

"Utterly ghastly rich," muttered Sir Roderick. "Oil, oil, oil, oil …"

"… built Elysium and endowed it, and fought the policy board to a standstill about our rights.… These breakfasts … gives them every month … to keep us

from getting rusty … must keep up, y'know.… Ah, Jeeter!"

A small and very bald footman in immaculate purple livery had appeared in the doorway ahead. "I beg pardon, sirs," Jeeter said smoothly, taking in Jan's clothes with only a slight widening of the eyes. "I've been quite perturbed. You've missed the wine, and her grace is already—"

"Announce us!" Sir Reginald ordered. "There are extr'ordinary and extenuating circumstances! This is an emergency!"

Jeeter's mouth opened and closed; he turned quickly and hurried away. As they followed, Jan whispered to Ginny, "Have you told Otis where we are?"

"I can't get him!" she said almost tearfully. "I've tried and tried, but of course it's so terribly early …"

He wondered if she knew anything about this curious place, but before he could ask she nodded and managed a tremulous smile, and then Jeeter was announcing them.

"Sir Reginald Weems and Sir Roderick Weems, with, ah, guests," Jeeter called out, with just the proper tone and flourish. "They offer apologies for their tardiness, but there are, er, ah, extenuating circumstances. An emergency is at hand!"

They had reached, Jan saw, the entrance to a glittering dining room where a great many well-dressed people were seated at a long, long table presided over by a small, white-haired, doll-like woman in black. Scurrying around the table with glasses and dishes were what appeared to be dozens of footmen in purple livery like Jeeter's. No one seemed to pay any attention to the first part of Jeeter's announcement, but when he came to the word "emergency" all action stopped. There was a sudden silence, and every eye was turned upon them.

Jan could not help wondering if most of these very elegant people had arrived here on the bicycles and large tricycles parked outside—then he realized they must have.

"Emergency?" repeated the doll-like woman at the head of the table. "I am aware, Reginald, that the outer world is still too much with us at times. Is this emergency fancy or fact? And who *are* these odd young guests of yours?"

"The emergency is a fact!" Sir Reginald burst out, holding down his excitement with difficulty. "We've been invaded, as our guests can tell you! Their names elude me, but they are kidnap victims. They haven't eaten for days … spent the entire night in the rain digging under the fence … had to give them some of Jeeter's clothes …"

"Hold it! *Who* invaded us?"

"That blighter Zworkin!"

"Zworkin is here?" said the doll-like woman, rising slowly. "*On this side of the fence?*"

"On this side of the fence, your grace!"

"With a van and a station wagon full of his rascals!" added Sir Roderick.

There was a sudden commotion near the foot of the table. A broad-shouldered man with a gray goatee, who looked, Jan thought, the way all famous explorers should look, backed cringing from his chair. "No!" he pleaded. "No! Don't let him come here! He'll put me in that—that—that *thing!*"

"It's all right, Bertie," the doll-like duchess assured him softly. "We'll never, *never* let him touch you."

"But—but if he comes here …"

"He'll be after Ginny and me," Jan told him quickly. "Anyhow, he can't hurt anyone with Matilda. I smashed it before we escaped."

Everyone was suddenly staring at him. "You *smashed* it?" the duchess said slowly.

"He certainly did!" Ginny said. "I saw him do it. He completely wrecked it."

"Bravo!" cried Sir Reginald.

"Bravo!" cried everyone else, including the footmen. "He wrecked Matilda!"

"Quiet!" the duchess ordered. "Matilda is disposed of—but Zworkin isn't. He's had the audacity to trespass on *our* side of the fence, in machines that are strictly forbidden here. We must *do* something! But first we must get to the bottom of this. Young man, who are you, and why did Dr. Zworkin kidnap the two of you?"

"I—I don't know my—"

"He doesn't know who he is," Ginny managed to say. "Matilda did something to his memory. I'm Ginny Rhodes. Jan and I were kidnapped because, well, because of certain abilities we have. Dr. Zworkin was going to blank out our memories and take us abroad, and—and make use of us. We—we'd be on our way now if Jan hadn't done something to their helicopter. But they've got another machine waiting—a truck to hide us in.… As soon as they catch us, they plan—"

"Only they won't catch you," the duchess interrupted, smiling sweetly. "We'll catch *them*." She glanced confidently around at the waiting footmen, and called abruptly, "Woolsey, Qualms, Livermore, Tyler, Shuttleworth—man your velocipedes and get to the main gate, fast. See that it and the small gate are locked, and stand by and let no one out. If Dr. Zworkin and his cohorts appear, you are to overpower them and bring them here for trial. And Woolsey—"

"Yes, your grace?" replied a tall footman standing near her.

"They may be desperate to leave, Woolsey, when they head back to the gate. But I trust you are quite capable of carrying out your assignment?"

"Quite, your grace, unless they are armed. May I suggest—"

"Arms are forbidden here, Woolsey, and I doubt if even Zworkin would be so foolish as to resort to them."

"But this is America, your grace, and kidnapping is a very serious crime. May I suggest that the local sheriff be notified and—"

"You may not. You know very well that we settle our own affairs in Elysium. But if you feel the need of a back-up force, I will grant it." She looked around quickly, and called, "Downs, Watson, Ethridge, Brooks, Addison—go with Woolsey's group and help them take Dr. Zworkin. On your way, all of you!"

As the members of the constabulary hurried out, looking somewhat uneasy, Jan thought, the duchess turned to a portly footman who evidently was the major-domo of the club. "Presterville," she ordered, "rearrange the table so that these young people may sit on either side of me."

The table was speedily rearranged, and Jan, feeling by now that he and Ginny had somehow been caught up and carried away in the current of an impossible dream, found himself sitting on the right of the duchess and next to a huge and constantly chattering woman in red, who wore an immense red hat of another age covered with roses. "Constantly repressed," she was saying. "Constantly. How anyone manages in that terrible world outside …"

Jan hardly heard the woman in red, for Jeeter had placed a delicious-looking omelette before him, and the duchess was urging him to eat.

"My dear," the duchess said presently to Ginny, "I do not wish to be unduly inquisitive, but are you blind?"

"Um—sort of," Ginny admitted between bites.

"I thought so! When I heard your name … Therefore, being a Rhodes, you surely must know all about Elysium."

Ginny nodded and smiled. "But Jan doesn't. He doesn't even know where it is."

"Then I shall enlighten him. Jan, I must tell you that Heron Rhodes and I are old friends. He helped create Elysium. As he himself has said many times, this is the only stronghold of sanity in a mad, mad world. Of course, the world outside, in its utter madness, thinks *we* are the mad ones."

She paused, and her silvery laugh tinkled forth. "Just because we insist upon being ourselves, like dear Angelina next to you—she loves red and her grandmother's styles—that impossible world outside would like nothing better than to force us to conform or take away all our rights. So Heron and I decided that the only intelligent thing to do would be to lock the world away—which we did. Of course," she added, with a slight lift of one shoulder, "all of us have our little weaknesses. Angelina has hers. I have mine, which I'll not mention. So of course we make all proper and due allowances …"

Jan could only look at her, his senses reeling. Then he stammered, "B-but where *is* Elysium?"

They were interrupted by a little cry from Ginny. "I just heard from Otis—Pops is on his way here! He's been driving around ever since dawn with Otis, waiting for him to wake up. So they must be close!"

The doll-faced duchess clapped her hands. "Oh, I shall be so glad to see him!" she exclaimed, accepting Ginny's announcement without question, as if it were a perfectly normal and routine matter for girls to pick up messages out of the blue. "Heron and I haven't had a good chat for months. I'm sure he'll arrive in time for breakfast. Presterville, set another place at—*Presterville! What's wrong?*"

Jan was dumfounded to see the portly major-domo backing across the room with his hands raised. There were quick, sharp commands, and Presterville and the remaining footmen and two cooks from the kitchen were herded against the opposite wall and made to face it, hands above their heads. Now Jan glimpsed a grim and very determined Bolinsky coming from the kitchen area, a stubby pistol in his hand. Behind him, also armed and equally grim and determined, were Harry and the heavy-faced George.

Sick inside, Jan turned and saw Big Doc, unshaven, coldly determined and desperate, approaching the other end of the table. He started to spin out of his chair, but froze to it as he made out the pistol in the doctor's plump hand. The pistol was quickly thrust against Sir Reginald's head.

"Do not move, boy, or he will die!" came the soft but entirely merciless voice. "Give us the least bit of trouble, and others will die. That goes for all of you at the table, so keep your seats. Helga—"

Jan sensed movement behind him. He knew what was coming, and fury rose in him, a fury made all the worse because there was nothing whatever he could do without risking the lives of everyone here. As the cloth sack was jerked down

over his head, and he felt the pressure of the all-too-familiar thumb against his neck, it flashed through his mind that this breakfast attack was a final move, brought about by complete desperation. It was the only possible move left, and it had to be successful. If it failed, Big Doc and Helga would not dare show their faces abroad. Nor would there be any refuge for them here.

Jan sagged abruptly and let himself go limp, pretending unconsciousness as the thumb dug viciously into his neck. Instantly Helga released the pressure, pulled him from his chair, and dragged him to the other side of the table.

"Put him in the van, Harry," she ordered, the tightness of fear and fatigue in her voice. "I'll take the girl—I want her between us in the front seat when we leave. George, help the doctor with the duchess—we'll all need her to get through the gate. Bolinsky, follow us out and lock the doors! Let's go!"

As Harry flung him over a shoulder and ran, Jan was aware of a cry of protest from the duchess, followed by the threatening sound of Bolinsky's voice and the slamming of doors. The cloth sack over his head, which had not been tied, was jolted loose on their passage through the kitchen; with a little help from his hand it fell off as they went through the rear door. No one seemed to notice.

Outside, from his head-down position, he caught a brief glimpse of the van, nearly hidden under the trees, as Harry sped down a curving walk toward it. Following came Helga, forcing Ginny to run by twisting her arm behind her back. Close behind were Big Doc and George with a disheveled and badly frightened duchess between them.

Jan was trying desperately to think of some plan of action when he heard a car approaching somewhere in the distance on one of the lanes. Could it be Heron Rhodes so soon? His sudden feeling of hope died on the instant when he realized that Heron, probably alone save for Otis and unarmed, would have to contend with four determined men with guns who certainly would not hesitate to shoot down anyone who tried to stand between them and freedom.

Helga also heard the car, for he saw her head jerk up in alarm, then she called hoarsely for the others to hurry, and gave Ginny's arm a sudden twist. Ginny gasped, and stumbled. Helga slapped her viciously, and Ginny cried out in pain and fell.

The agonized sound of Ginny's cry abruptly propelled Jan to movement. Before the astounded Harry quite knew what was happening, Jan had twisted like an eel from his grasp. He landed on hands and knees and sprang toward Helga with fury in his eye. If he had had the forgotten hatchet in his hand, which he had left at the fence, he might have hesitated. But he had only his empty hand, which he pointed trembling toward her as if it were all the weapon he needed to stop her.

Helga stiffened as if struck by a force beyond imagining. Her mouth fell open and stayed open as a glazed look came over her face. Then her legs gave way and she crumpled to the ground and sat there awkwardly, staring at nothing.

Ginny cried a warning, and Jan whirled in time to escape a swing from Harry's pistol. He concentrated on the pistol, and the man backed away in fright, and suddenly gasped and dropped the weapon as if it had turned hot in his hand. Jan spun about and saw George gaping in disbelief at the crumpled Helga, his weapon and the duchess forgotten. Behind him a wide-eyed Bolinsky was also staring at Helga as if the world had all at once come to an end. Only Big Doc

seemed in full possession of his senses.

"Shoot him, you fools," the big man ordered, tugging to free the pistol caught in the pocket of his soiled jacket. "Shoot him before he wrecks us all!"

The pistol came free and the plump hand tried to raise it, but abruptly it dropped even as Harry's had dropped, and a new voice ordered, "Leave him to me, Jan! He's mine!"

Only now did Jan see the white Rolls, which had shot around the other side of the club building, demolishing a rose garden in its hasty progress. A very grim and haggard Heron Rhodes had leaped from it, and was pointing a retributive finger at Big Doc.

"It's all over, Zworkin!" Heron snapped.

Big Doc whitened and started backing away, no longer aware of his doll-faced hostage. "*No—no—no—*" he pleaded, but the last *no* died as his mouth fell open and stayed open, and the flabby body began to sag. He fell on his knees and sprawled there, braced by his plump, limp hands, a great empty hulk, alive but uncomprehending.

Even as Zworkin fell, the members of the constabulary were racing toward them through the trees, and Nat Martin and a half dozen agents were pouring from their cars.

It was, indeed, all over. The morning sun, Jan saw, as he helped Ginny to her feet, was now shining brightly above the trees.

"Certainly she's a real duchess," Heron Rhodes said one morning at breakfast, when everyone had recovered from the ordeal. "Marie of Bratisburg, or something like that. But all she has left today are the oil fields her husband left her. More than enough, however, to start Pine Ridge Sanitarium, and build and maintain Elysium."

Jan shook his head. "I—I just couldn't believe it when I looked back that morning and saw the Pine Ridge sign over the main gate."

"Well, it jolted me when I discovered where you were," Heron admitted. "I couldn't believe it either. You see, that old mansion wasn't part of the original Pine Ridge estate. I knew nothing about it. Zworkin's people bought it, fenced it to join the estate, then donated it to Pine Ridge after they got Zworkin established as a specialist for violent cases. Infiltration. That's what it was. Those dingalated rascals!"

"All those fences—"

"Oh, that place is fenced to glory. The tea house you found, that's for the lesser members of the staff. The duchess had it fenced off from the inner sanctum for privacy. You should see the tea house for the top members. As for the inner sanctum—Elysium—that's a world apart. No one enters except by invitation, or in an emergency. If you're a patient inside, no matter how dotty you are, you've got it made. Frankly, if the world gets any crazier, when *I* get older—"

"Aw, Pops!" Ginny protested.

"Well, why not? When I consider it, Elysium strikes me as an eminently sane place. You must realize, of course, that no one can claim absolute sanity. Everyone is a bit off in one way or another. But pshaw, that's nothing. You have only to read the daily headlines to realize the whole world's demented. Absolutely, irrevocably—"

"Oh, Heron!" Hecuba interrupted. "Will you get off your soapbox and get on to

Jan?"

"I'm coming to him, m'dear. Jan, I should tell you that we found all your records in Zworkin's files in the mansion. Added to what Sergeant Bricker and Bill Zorn have been able to dig up during the past week, we have the whole story. But just telling you isn't the right thing for you. It should come from your own mind. Now, by this time you've no doubt that there's Aragon blood in you."

"It—it's pretty evident," Jan mumbled.

"I see you're still upset by what you did to Helga. Well, don't be. It's better that she and Leopold finish their lives as morons, than to be locked up for a few years and then turned loose to start their rotten work all over again."

"Maybe so," Jan admitted. "But I hate knowing that I have that awful ability —"

"That's good, for then you won't abuse it. You've read the book, so you know that no one of our blood ever has. You must look upon it as something given you for defense, like a cat's claws. And you must remember that the power you generate depends upon the violence of your emotions. Take those blackbirds I used to kill when I was a kid. I did it only because they used to drive away the bluebirds. The very sight of one—"

Heron shrugged. "The thing is, you could never have brought Helga to her knees so quickly if Ginny hadn't meant so much to you."

Ginny's cheeks began to pink, and Hecuba said quickly, "I was in the back seat of the car and saw it all. I know I'm vindictive, but I wouldn't have missed it for anything. And those doctors who've examined them simply can't understand—"

Otis wailed, "When are you gonna regress him? I wanna know—"

"We're not going to regress him," Heron said. "We're simply going to ask him questions."

"I suggest," said Hecuba, "that you let Ginny do the questioning. She was with him when he got that shock on the wall, and she knows what's been going on in his mind."

Ginny rubbed a freckle on her cheek, then said quietly, "You've already put most of it together, Jan. But let's start with the Glendale station where I first saw you. When you escaped that day and ran away, why were you so anxious to get to the station?"

"To meet you," he said.

"*Me?*" she exclaimed. "But how—"

"I *had* to get there before you left on the train," he told her. "You see, you were the only clue I had in the world. I'd overheard Big Doc and Helga talking about the two of us, and I knew you'd be at the station on a certain day at a certain time. So getting to the station before you left became the most important thing in my life. But because of Matilda, I'd forgotten everything else by the time I got there."

"I had a feeling it was something like that," said Heron. "But go on, Pet."

Ginny said, "Tell me your mother's name again."

"Teresa."

"And your father's?"

"Raoul."

"Your father's last name?"

"Er—uh, Riggs. But no, it *can't* be Riggs."

"Why not?"

"Because Riggs is dead."

"You're sure?"

"Of course I'm sure. I—I saw him … killed."

"How was Riggs killed?" Ginny asked very quietly.

"He—he—he—it happened on a bus. A small bus like a van, with seats in the back."

"*What* happened?"

"We—we were being taken somewhere at night. We'd been in a boy's home of some sort, a real tough place, but they were glad to get rid of us because Brice was always causing trouble, and I was always running away. Bolinsky was driving the bus, and Big Doc and Helga were following in a car. They'd given us shots to put us to sleep, but I woke up before Brice did, and—and—"

"Jan, what *happened?*"

"The bus had stopped, and Big Doc had come inside. He had what looked like a jack handle in his hand, and he hit Brice with it. Then they took me out and let the bus run off the road, down what seemed like a high embankment …"

There was a silence. Then Heron said, "We had an idea it was something like that. Go on, son."

"That's all I know, because they gave me another shot, and when I woke up I was in a tiny cell somewhere."

"Marysville," muttered Heron. "Because, having become Brice Riggs, and a homicidal maniac according to your papers, as well as a state resident, you had to clear through them."

"Anyway, the next time I woke up, they were taking me out of Matilda, and I didn't know much of anything. I'd forgotten what happened on the bus, and didn't begin to remember it till after I got that shock on the wall."

"Then you started remembering your father," Ginny reminded him. "What was his last name?"

"Riggs—no, of course not. That's from Big Doc's tape recording I had to listen to in my sleep. If you've found out my full name, why don't you just tell me?"

"Naw," said Otis aloofly. "That would be poor therapy. You gotta do your own remembering."

Ginny said, "Your mother's name was Teresa, and you know she was Spanish. Were you christened Jan?"

"Er—no. She called me that because my father liked it. But she didn't write it that way in the Bible."

"How did she write it?"

"J-u-a-n. Oh! I was really named Juan."

"How did she write the rest of it?"

"I think it was T-r-e—"

"Go on."

"T-r-e-m-a-i-n-e.

There was a dead silence while they all looked at him. "Tremaine," he said slowly. "I'm Juan Tremaine. But who—"

Then his mouth came open in shock as he remembered. "Why, I—I must be your cousin! The Tremaine cousin you told me about, that you thought had been killed …"

“Yes,” said Hecuba, dabbing quickly at her eyes. “You’re the last Tremaine. They disguised it as Aragon in the book, but the real name is Tremaine. Our mother was one, so we’re your family. You—you must call me Cousin Heck.”

“You’re not calling me Cousin Heron,” growled her brother. “You’re calling me Pops like the others do.”

Ginny smiled tremulously and touched his hand under the table. “Welcome home!” she said.

About the Author

Alexander Key (1904–1979) started out as an illustrator before he began writing science fiction novels for young readers. He has published many titles, including *Sprockets*: *A Little Robot, Mystery of the Sassafras Chair*, and *The Forgotten Door*, winner of the Lewis Carroll Shelf Award. Key's novel *Escape to Witch Mountain* was adapted for film in 1975, 1995, and 2009.

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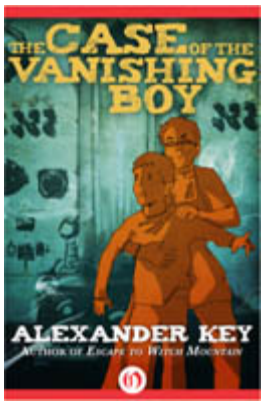

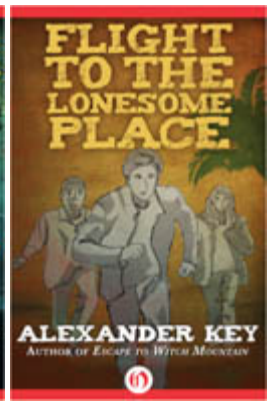

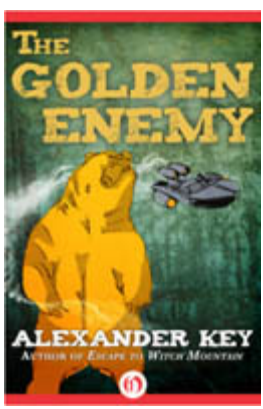

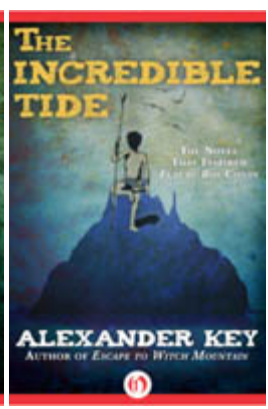

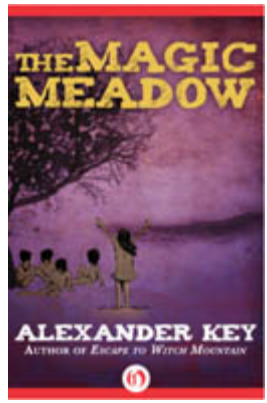

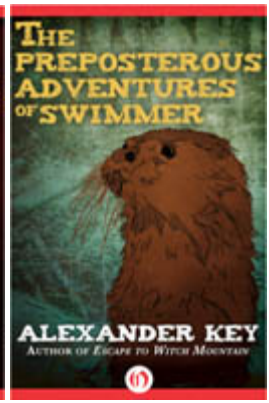

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